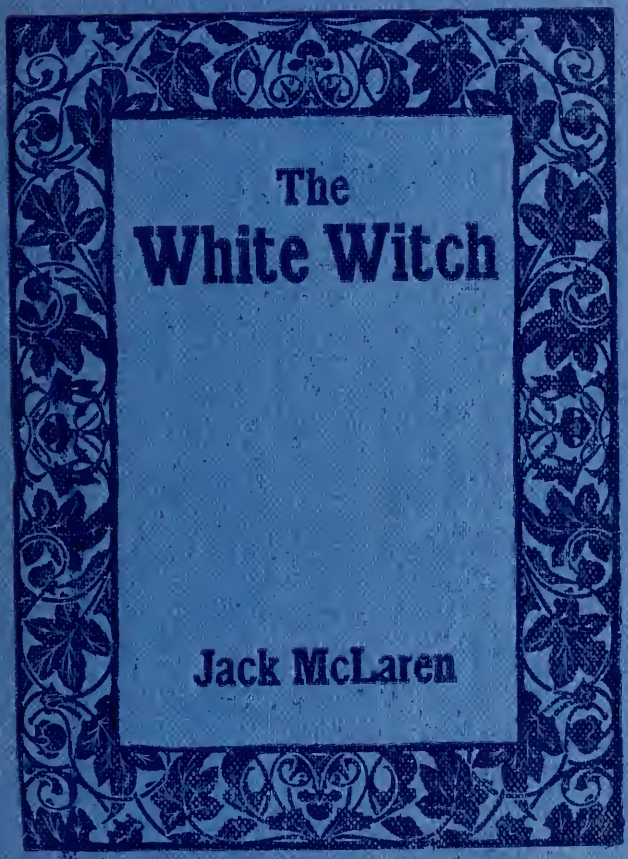
The
White Witch
Jack McLaren

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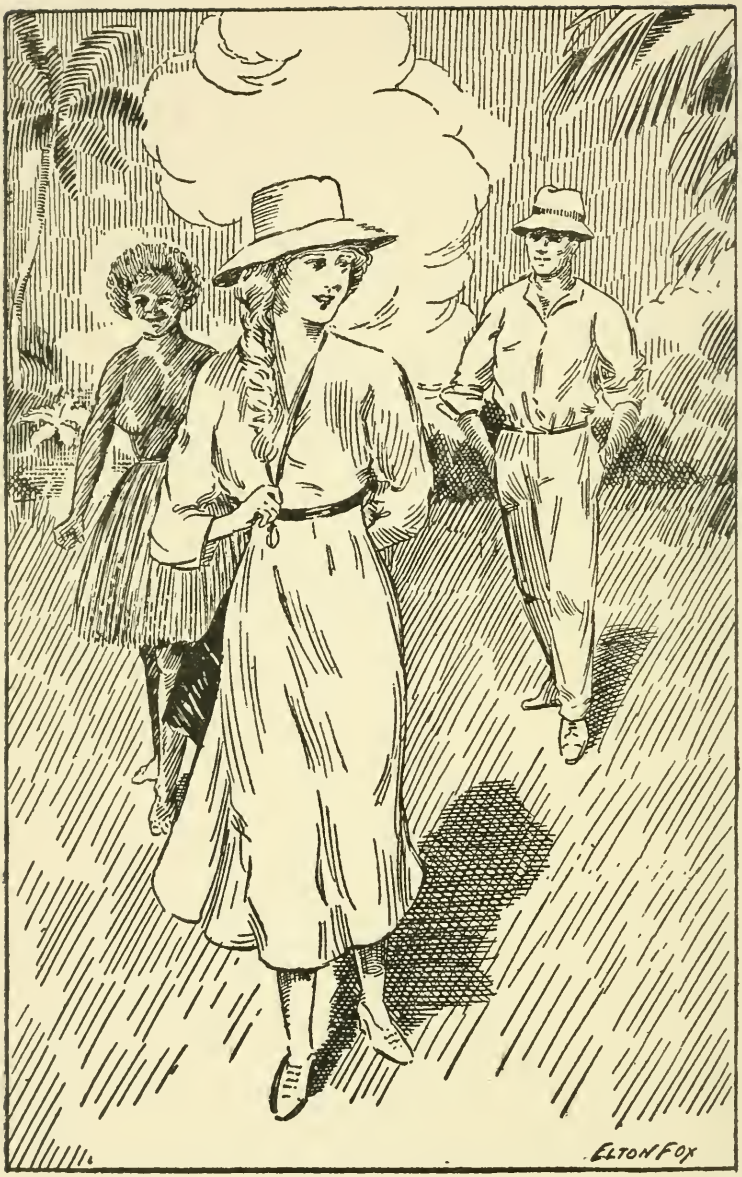

"She went at once, Lapa a yard behind her." p. 130

The White Witch

BY

Jack McLaren

Illustrated by Elton Fox

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The White Witch

CHAPTER I.

THE TRADE ROOM IS EMPTY

Peter Sherwin stepped out on to the verandah of the trading station and blew sharply on a whistle. A native lying in the shade of a clump of coconut-palms rose at the summons and approached. He was an old man clad in a loin-cloth of red calico that left him naked above the waist and his legs bare. The space between his nostrils was torn and distended, as were the lobes of his ears.

"You look boat yet?" the white man asked.

The native grunted. "No come yet. I no savee what's matter."

"Two days from Thursday Island to Daru, two days from there to discharge and pick up cargo, and then, say, three more days to get here," Sherwin calculated. "She should have been here by Saturday at the latest. That is a generous enough allowance. Yet here it is Wednesday afternoon and no sign of her. I hope nothing's wrong." He turned to the native. "Tell them man in village to look out good, Bamu. Tell them sing out when they look sail."

"I been speak them feller," Bamu said. "I tell them might be you give one stick tobacco to man who look boat first time."

Sherwin laughed. "You are an old scamp to go promising things on my behalf, Bamu. I fancy you want to impress the village that you are running this station. All right, I give tobacco, right enough," he added. "Now hurry up and see if those other fellows have finished filling those copra bags."

Bamu went immediately and Sherwin took out his pipe and lit it. Then he sprawled indolently in a canvas chair, his bare feet resting on the verandah railing. He was about thirty-five years of age, brown-haired, grey-eyed and tall if he cared to straighten his back.

"Never been so cut out of everything before," he said to himself. "The blooming store-room has never been so empty since it was built. Down to the last pound of tobacco, even, and not a jew's-harp, trade-mirror or fathom of calico on the premises. And just when there is a rush on! Mobs of niggers floating down from the up-river country with canoe-loads of coconuts and copra! I never saw such a lot of good trade before! And here's me without a blessed thing to barter with. I wonder what's delaying the 'Mokohu?' Just my luck that the supply ship should be late at this time."

He laughed good-humoredly enough and stared through the coconut-palms at the grey-blue sea and the surf pounding on the beach. "But what's the use of grumbling?" he went on. "An isolated New Guinea trader has to learn to cheerfully put up with things as they come."

The trading station stood in the centre of a peninsula a quarter of a mile long and not more than three feet above high-tide mark. On one side was a waste of heaving, uneasy water unrelieved by a single island, reef or sandbank for as far as the eye could reach. From up over the horizon came an endless succession of mighty rollers that moved with a certain stately grace and dignity, seemingly undisturbed by the coarse jest of the wind lashing their heads into spray. On reaching the shallows of the shore, each wall of water half-halted in its turn and reared like a wilful horse. Then, with a roar that had a note of groaning agony, they crashed forward on their faces and rushed high up the beach in welters of smothering foam.

On the other side was a mile-wide river that paralleled the coast for some distance from its mouth before curving away inland. It lapped the low bank gently, caressingly, the faintest echo of the roaring, crashing ocean outside. From bank to bank it was a stretch of sapphire-hued water, fanned by the wind into series of following ripples that gleamed iridescent in the sparkling sunlight and danced as though alive. From the point of the peninsula to the opposite shore, right across the river's mouth, was an unbroken line of breakers that indicated the whereabouts of the bar. The bar was responsible for the smoothness of the water inside the river. It was the doorstep that tripped the rollers seeking to force an entrance.

The station consisted of a half-dozen buildings of coconut and nipa-palm fronds thatched over a frame of bush timber. The largest was the trader's residence—a two-roomed bungalow, wide-verandahed and high off the ground. A copra-house and store stood immediately at the rear, and to the left and right were the living quarters of the natives connected with the station.

There were coconut-palms everywhere, the ground being streaked and cris-crossed with their shade. In clusters, in pairs and singly they leaned at all angles, some with their tops entwined, others standing away by themselves as though of another caste and disdainful. Both beaches were fringed with them, some growing so close to the water that the tidal action had uncovered masses of their long, brown lateral roots.

A string of natives carrying coconuts lashed together in pairs across long poles filed up to the clear space in front of the house. As they dumped their burdens on to the ground, Sherwin took his feet off the rail and surveyed them somewhat gloomily.

"No good," he said. "I no got tobacco, no calico. Everything finish. Can't buy coconut till schooner come."

The natives spoke amongst themselves for a few moments. Then the one who knew the most English addressed Sherwin:—

"No matter. We leave-im coconut. Bye-em-bye when schooner come we get pay."

"No you don't," the white man said quickly. "A hundred coconuts left on those terms would grow to a thousand when the stores arrived. There would be endless argument. Bamu!" The old man came running. "Explain to these people I no want them to leave the nuts. Tell 'em to take the lot away at once. If I start buying on credit, I will end up by paying for about three times the quantity. Savee?"

Bamu addressed the others in a series of quick, jerky sentences. He was a coastal native and general factotum on the station. The others belonged to an up-river village and knew little about white-man trading. Bamu regarded himself as being immensely their superior. He did not bother to go into any detailed explanation of Sherwin's refusal to allow the nuts to be left, and when he finished, he turned to his master.

"I tell them you sorry for them they not got tobacco to smoke," he said. "But you mus' wait schooner come first time. Then I tell them go hell." He smiled broadly. "They all go now."

The natives had shouldered their loads of nuts and were making off in the direction of the village.

"You must not talk like that, Bamu," Sherwin said, sternly. "You'll drive all the trade away."

"No good them feller hum-bug round here." Bamu's tone was stubborn.

"You no talk like that longa man come here for trade any more," Sherwin said. "I'll pitch you out on your head if you do it again. Savee? Send you back to the village, where you'll have to live on yams and taro and coconut. I think you are getting too accustomed to tin-meat and other white-man tucker."

Bamu hung his head.

"All right, Taubada (Master). I speak proper next time."

"Now go and tell the cook-boy to hurry-up my kai-kai (food). I think he must be asleep."

Bamu mounted the steps on to the verandah and went to the kitchen at the rear, and presently a young native in a white loin-cloth appeared and intimated that luncheon was ready.

Sherwin rose and went to the end of the verandah, where a small table was laid out.

"The last tin of meat and no milk or sugar," he said, drawing up a chair and sitting down. "What has the cook roused up for me?"

It was a poor meal to set before a white man. There were boiled yams, pink and hard-looking; sweet-potatoes roasted, and split down the centre; some fried fish, and an unopened tin of boiled beef. A jug of coconut water stood in the centre of the table.

"I would like a cup of tea immensely," Sherwin muttered. "I'm tired of this everlasting coconut mush. And yams! And sweet-potatoes! It's the tucker that gets us down in New Guinea. The fever gets the blame, but if there was plenty of fresh, white-man's food we would be ever so much better off."

He picked at the fish and ate a half of one of the sweet-potatoes. The tin of meat he left unopened: there was no telling he might be glad of it before the stores arrived. He had been ten years in the wilds of the Gulf of Papua, and he knew that the unexpected was more often to be expected than otherwise.

He was midway through the meal when a shout arose from the direction of the village. Sherwin jumped up, and the cook-boy came running.

"Sail-oh!" cried the latter. "Schooner come!"

Sherwin went along the verandah to where an absence of sunblinds afforded a clear view of the sea. For a time he saw nothing but the waste of heaving water; then he spied a tiny upright speck on the western horizon.

"She is standing out on the long tack," he said to himself. "The wind is dead ahead. She will go about presently and stand in for the shore. Then another long tack ought to put her in a position to run in here. Another long leg and a short one ought to do it."

A crowd of natives flocked up to the house, all shouting excitedly and pointing seaward. Sherwin silenced them with a gesture.

"Who been look schooner first time?" he asked. Three or four voices answered, and a young woman stepped forward. She was dressed in a waist-to-knee petticoat of broad-bladed grass, and about her arms were shell bangles and ornaments of plaited cane. She stood straight and erect with the grace that comes to bearers of head-burdens, and her necks and arms were rounded and full.

"You look first, Lapa?" Sherwin asked.

The girl nodded, and Sherwin threw a couple of sticks of "trade" tobacco down to her. She picked them up and wound them in her fuzzy hair, and stepped back to the others.

"That girl, Lapa, got eye more better than man," said Bamu, appearing suddenly beside the white man. "She look very quick. 'Spose man take Lapa longa canoe when they go look for turtle, mus' they get plenty. She 'nother kind, that feller."

Sherwin sent to the village for the best canoe-men, and when they were assembled in front of the house, he ordered them to have their canoes ready to take the copra out to the schooner and to bring the stores back. The south-east trade wind had been blowing hard for over a week, and a sea had arisen on the river bar which made it far too risky to attempt crossing with a deep-draughted schooner like the "Mokohu." The alternative was for the vessel to anchor off the beach, well clear of the outer line of breakers, and transport her cargo to the shore by means of canoes. This meant a lot of hard, rough, dangerous work, and it was a first principle that the

canoes should be in first-class order. After that everything depended on the skill of the paddlers. Sherwin explained to the men that on the first fall of the tide after the schooner anchored they were to bring the canoes to the beach in front of the station and load with a bag of copra each. At low water the surf would be moderated to some extent and the canoes would have a better chance of getting out with their cargo dry.

The natives nodded understandingly, for they were old hands at surf-running, and these were the pick of the village. There was a dozen of them, all young, strong men with splendid chests and big arm-muscles. Their skin was the color of old leather that had been unduly exposed to the elements, and their hair was teased out and fuzzed into the semblance of a mop. Each carried a lime-pot fashioned from a gourd. As Sherwin spoke they chewed beetlenut and conveyed the lime to their mouths by means of pieces of flat wood wetted with saliva.

When satisfied that they fully understood, Sherwin sent them away, and then he got out his order book and ran over a list of items for the "Mokohu" to bring on her next trip. The schooner ran a two-monthly service from Thursday Island to the Woodlarks—a distance of seven hundred miles when the deviations caused by ports of call were considered. Every native along the far-flung coast of the Gulf of Papua was familiar with her appearance, and the sight of no other vessel caused so much delight and rejoicing. For the "Mokohu" was the link with the outer world; she brought the traders turkey-red calico, sheath-knives, tomahawks, fish-hooks, scented hair-oil and a hundred other things dear to the native heart. She supplied the isolated missionaries and traders with mails and newspapers and distributed the gossip of the beaches. It was necessary to order goods a trip ahead, for there was no other means of communication during the two months that elapsed between the schooner's visits. Sherwin closed the

book at last and sat watching the speck gradually growing bigger. The "Mokohu" was on the shore tack now, and she had made so much headway that the full length of her masts was visible.

"It will be touch-and-go whether she gets here before dark," he said, glancing at the position of the sun. "That will mean putting off the cargo till to morrow. I hope the wind goes down, for it will be the very devil for the canoes in the surf."

Fifty or sixty natives drifted up from the village during the afternoon and lined the fringe of the beach to watch the approach of the schooner. As her hull became visible it was seen that her sails were close-reefed.

"He find big sea," commented Bamu. "Too much wind al'ogether. I think might-be he no come anchor here. Might-be Cap'n too much frighten'." The same fear had been in Sherwin's heart all the afternoon, but he had tried to put it from him. Would the "Mokohu's" Captain think it too dangerous to anchor off the station in the present state of the weather? he wondered. It would certainly be taking a risk to come in close; but then an old hand like the Captain would not be guilty of such a mistake. He was a man who was accustomed to taking risks merely as a part of his business, but he would not do things foolishly or unnecessarily. He would keep well out and trust to Sherwin's canoe-men to get the cargo ashore. He had done it before, and there was no reason why he should not do it again. But a little something persistently told Sherwin that the "Mokohu" had never had the bad luck to strike such a terrific sea as was on just now. She was generally a lucky ship in the matter of weather.

At sundown the schooner was only two miles away and lying along the shore. The stiff sou'-easter howled down with increasing fury at the approach of night, and the vessel heeled over till her lee rail was continually awash. Sherwin watched her with straining eyes. Was she intending to go past? He

tried to see if she was attempting to make any signal, but the quick-growing darkness baffled him.

It was almost dark when the figure of a woman appeared at the verandah steps.

"What it is, Lapa?" Sherwin asked.

The young woman pointed to the shadowy shape of the "Mokohu," now almost abreast of the village.

"Singal!" she exclaimed.

Sherwin's heart leapt, and he tried to pick out the tops of the masts in an effort to distinguish the flag that was the agreed-upon anchoring signal. He saw nothing of it, but even as he looked he knew that Lapa's eyes had seen what was hidden from his, for suddenly the "Mokohu" rounded up to the wind, her sails flapped and slowly began to descend.

Then the darkness of the tropic night came down and shut out the view.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF THE SUPPLY SHIP

After tea Sherwin took a book round to the rear verandah and settled down for a quiet read. This side of the house was sheltered from the wind and the lamp burned steadily and without an annoying flicker. But, somehow, he could not set his mind on the book. He read without assimilating the meaning of the words. A strange uneasiness was creeping over him, and twice he got up and went to the front and stared into the wind-swept darkness.

With the coming of the night the wind had increased and the pounding of the surf had swelled to a sullen roar. The flimsily-built house swayed and

creaked, and an intermittent flapping told of a portion of the palm-thatch broken loose from its lashings.

"I suppose I am worrying for nothing," he muttered once. "Morton is too shrewd to anchor too close in. Still, it looked to me as if she should have been a bit further out. But then it was hard to tell in that dim light. I wish the moon was up, so that I could see."

He went inside and brought out a watch to the lamp.

"Eight o'clock, and the moon full four days past. It will show up in about an hour. I'll wait for it."

He took up the book again and turned its pages listlessly. Then he put it down and filled his pipe. For a time he sat smoking, his ears subconsciously trying to detect a falling off in the velocity of the wind. He got up and began pacing the floor, his hands clasped behind him.

As he turned at the corner of the verandah, Bamu appeared. The old man's face wore a gloomy expression, and, as the white man stopped in front of him, he opened his mouth to speak, hesitated, and closed it again.

"What's the matter with you, you lump of misery?" Sherwin asked. Bamu coughed and stuttered.

"Big sea come," he said at last. "Too much big sea."

Sherwin knew what was in the native's mind.

"What you think?" he asked simply.

Again Bamu hesitated, shrinking back into the shadows till only his eyes reflected the lamp-light.

"I—no—savee," he said very slowly. "Nobody savee."

"Come on," said Sherwin, buttoning his singlet at the neck and slipping on a pair of sand-shoes. "We go."

He led the way along the verandah and down the steps. On the ground both headed by mutual im-

pulse for the village. Bamu took the lead along the beach, Sherwin stumbling along as best he could behind. In ten seconds both were sopping wet with the spray of the seas thundering on the shore, and particles of flying sand struck their faces and got into their eyes.

"She ought to be quite safe," Sherwin kept repeating to himself. "She is well over two miles out. That ought to be enough." But somehow the thought did not relieve him.

At the village a half-dozen fires of quick-burning sticks flared in positions that could be clearly seen from out to sea. A number of women sat round each fire, feeding it as the flames threatened to die down. Twenty or thirty men were engaged in drawing some canoes higher up on the beach, where they would be well out of reach of the advancing seas. Others sat in little groups beating the palms of their hands against their thighs.

"Them feller make one big cry," Bamu said as Sherwin sat down on the ground beside a coconut-palm. "They very sorry."

"What are they sorry for?"

"Wind too much angry, too much wild al'ogether."

"And what's the wind angry for?"

"Wind make bad friend longa sea. Them two feller fight. Wind fight sea; sea fight wind. Might-be schooner broke."

Before Sherwin could make any comment, Bamu slipped across to where a score of old men were sitting in an outer circle of firelight. He sat down amongst them, and presently the white man's ears caught a note or two of a chant above the roar of the surf and the ripping of the wind.

"They are not a very cheerful crowd, I must say," Sherwin thought as he turned to the eastward to look for the first light of the moon.

"Niggers are always anticipating trouble. They ——" He stopped as he realised that he himself was not free from forebodings.

It was not long before the eastern sky began to lighten, and soon a faint flush appeared which quickly strengthened. The new-born light revealed numerous layers of nimbus clouds, and when the upper limb of the moon appeared its light was half-hidden behind a veil of white. Sherwin waited impatiently for the big disc to struggle up clear, but masses of cloud continually got in the way. It was not nearly so dark now, but the furthest the white man's straining eyes could see were the white tops of the breakers of the second line.

The natives were all crowding to the water's edge now, their hands shielding their faces from the spray, all waiting for the moon to win free of the entangling clouds. Stolidly, impassively, they stared seaward, not a man or woman speaking.

Despite the sound of wind and sea, Sherwin was conscious of a sensation of tense, high-strung silence, a silence that rasped the nerves and gave distinct physical pain. Yet the scene and circumstances were of noise and strife and struggle. The wind, screaming a nocturne of hate, lashed and whipped the water; and the water, roaring, tossed its head and snapped back savagely. The moon fought against a smother of clouds determined on blotting out this disc of light that dared to invade their domain from the regions below the horizon. But the sensation of silence was more penetrating, more impressive, than the conflict.

Suddenly the clouds fell away, and the moon shone clearly for the full area of its surface. The natives shouted with one accord and pointed. "He up-sail!" cried Bamu, who was standing near Sherwin. "He try get away!"

In the unhampered moonlight the "Mokohu" was clearly visible now, and Sherwin saw that she had lifted her anchor and got under weigh. Her sails were still double-reefed and she was racing through the water on a course parallel to the shore.

"No can do," said Bamu. "He go loo'ard all the time."

"Shut up, you croaker!" Sherwin exclaimed. "You always try to make out things to be worse than they are."

But, nevertheless, he knew that the "Mokohu" would have to do some fine sailing to get out. The wind was blowing directly on to the shore, and that meant that the vessel would have to sail right up to the wind. There was no favoring slant; every yard would have to be fought for.

Presently the vessel swung up in a sharp curve till her nose smelt the wind. Here she hung a moment, irresolute, uncertain, her sails flapping, her masts splitting the wind. Then, as though in response to sudden resolve, she heeled over and fell away on the other tack.

Sherwin sighed his relief. With her reduced sail area there had been the danger of "missing stays," in which case a lot of ground would have been lost in getting her into position for another attempt at going about-ship.

A few minutes later the "Mokohu" took another tack, and, though she again went round safely, it was clearly evident she was a little closer to the outer line of breakers than before.

"Too much go loo'ard!" said Bamu. "Bye-em-bye he broke al'ogether. I too much sorry for that schooner."

For an hour the laboring vessel beat up and down, slogging across the wind and going about in a manner that told of a skilful hand at the wheel. But all the time her leeway took her a little further inshore. The moon floated clear, except for an occasional scurry of cloud streaking its face for a moment, and as the schooner rose on top of the high waves the details of her hull and deck were visible to the watchers on the beach. Sherwin could see the figure of the man at the wheel and two or three others standing on the deck near the after rigging. Sherwin watched with his hand so tightly clenched that

the nails drew blood. He had been a sailor himself —master and owner of a small craft that poked about the rivers and inlets of Western New Guinea—and the sight of the schooner fighting against heavy odds stirred his sea-instincts. He continually calculated her chances of escape, now hoping, now despairing. Would it not be wiser if the reefs were shaken out? he asked himself. With more sail the vessel would certainly travel faster and make less leeway. But could she carry it in such a wind? That was the question. More sail might mean the loss of a mast; and then there would be nothing to prevent the crippled vessel drifting helplessly into the breakers. He decided that the Skipper, with a full knowledge of the capabilities of his craft, had reckoned it all out and decided to carry on as he was doing.

The natives had begun wailing now, the high-pitched voices of the women piercing the roar of the surf. The fires, unattended since the appearance of the moon, had died down to a scatter of glowing coals. A couple of mangy dogs and a long-snouted pig or two prospected the colder ashes for scraps of food, now and then assisting the wailing chant of their owners with a howl or grunt. From one of the houses came the intermittent crying of a child, and the leaves of the coconut-palms sighed and soughed and occasionally groaned. The spirit of mournfulness was in the very air.

The "Mokohu" was very near the breakers now. From the shore it looked as if a distance of not more than two hundred yards separated her from the white-topped outer line. In spite of all her brave sailing, her battling, her taking advantage of every favoring trifle, she had lost a mile of ground. It was with a sinking heart that Sherwin realised that the vessel was doomed. He was not thinking of his stores, or the inconvenience their loss would cause him; such thought had not entered his head from the time he had first seen the schooner was in danger. It distressed his sailor's love of a ship to see a vessel

destroyed. Hardly knowing what he did, he shook his fist at the sea and hurled imprecations into the teeth of the wind.

"Schooner al'ogether broke now very quick," said Bamu's voice. The old man was sitting on the sand, his legs crossed beneath him, his arms raised as though in benediction. "Wind too much angry, sea too much angry. No good!" His voice assumed a droning note. "Plenty man dead bye-em-bye. Big sea, big wind——"

Sherwin grasped him by the hair and jerked him to his feet.

"Get out of this!" he roared. "Clear out——"

He stopped abruptly as a shout arose from the other natives. He dropped Bamu and looked seaward again.

The "Mokohu" was falling away from the wind rapidly. Her bow was swinging so as to point to the shore. Then, with the great seas directly behind her, she headed straight for the breakers.

"The best thing he could have done!" Sherwin exclaimed. "The ship will be smashed up, but the men might have a chance."

He assembled the natives and instructed them to be ready to bear a hand when the vessel grounded. There was no hope of a canoe living a minute in even the nearest of the breakers, but a practised surf-swimmer might hold his own for a few minutes. He sent to the houses for any lengths of native rope that could be found at short notice, and he drove the women and youngsters back up the beach out of the way.

The "Mokohu" took the first breaker of the outer line clean over her and emerged still holding her course for the shore.

"Good steering!" Sherwin ejaculated. "It would have been easy enough for her to have got beam-on and capsized."

A distance of about forty yards separated the lines of breakers, and for a few seconds the schooner

travelled through unbroken water. Then she rose high on a roller that broke into foaming froth beneath her and sent showers of spray far up the sails. She slipped easily enough into the trough left by the departing sea, but before she could again rise, a great breaker lifted her stern high in the air and surged over her full length. For ten long seconds she was completely submerged, and the watchers on the beach thought her decks had been stove in and she would never reappear. But presently the distressed vessel shot up, still heading straight for the shore, one of her masts gone and her deck swept clean of dinghies, galley, and bulwarks.

"He come right in now," said Bamu. "Big high-water."

The worst of the breakers were behind her now, but she was still in a bad way. Instead of following one another with easy regularity the seas were all jumbled up, a mass of whirling, rushing water. The vessel was tossed from side to side, the seas breaking over and across her from all directions. But she held her course in a more or less direct manner that called from Sherwin fresh admiration of the skill of the steersman.

It was a weird sight. The bright moonlight outlined the details of the crippled vessel struggling in the grip of the surf. The stump of the broken mast projected about five feet above the top of the cabin house, a mass of tangled rigging and torn canvas trailed over the side. The starboard stays of the remaining mast were gone, and the mast itself, deprived of half of its support, leaned dangerously to one side. The sail had lost its whiteness through being wetted and a dozen ragged holes showed in its grey-brown area. At the wheel and against the broken mast were three figures. Sherwin knew they must be lashed in their places, for no unattached thing could have kept the deck in that welter of sea. He wondered if these were the sole survivors. The

"Mokohu" often carried passengers—traders on business visits to other parts of the coast; missionaries going away on furlough; government officials visiting outlying stations. Sherwin fervently hoped there were no passengers on this, the last, trip of the "Mokohu."

The schooner was bumping the bottom now. Sherwin could tell from the sluggish way she lifted her stern to the seas. She was still too far out for swimmers to reach her, and when the natives pressed round him with suggestions that they should try getting a line off, he shook his head.

"Wait little bit," he said. "It's a very big tide and she will come in long way yet. We wait till she is close-to."

He watched the vessel bumping the ground and wondered at the strength of the hull that could survive such treatment. All the time she forged ahead, stopping for an instant as she took the ground, then rushing forward on top of the next sea.

The tide was at its top now, the water breaking over the grass above the bare sand of the beach. In some places it splashed the front of a village house that had been built a little nearer the water's edge than the others. One of these, a long, narrow building with a high, arched front facing the sea, was wet for a quarter of its length. It was a Dubu, or meeting-house of the chiefs.

"She will come right ashore," Sherwin said. The schooner was very close now and grounding heavily between seas. "The beach slopes so steeply here that at the present state of the tide and sea there are full five fathoms only twenty yards out."

He was right. For, suddenly, the wreck of the "Mokohu" perched high on a monster wave, hung a moment as though trying to balance, and then slipped forward and crashed on to the sand, her splintered jib-boom striking the front of the Dubu.

Then, above the hissing of the receding water, came a hoarse voice from the deck—

"**Grab the girl!**"

CHAPTER III.

THE LADY PASSENGER

Followed by a score of natives, Sherwin grasped some of the broken gear trailing from the bow and scrambled on board. He made his way aft, carefully, for the force with which the vessel had struck the beach had buckled the deck and burst the seams. He clung to the stump of the mainmast till a surging sea swept past and receded. Then he approached the wheel.

"Is that you, Morton?" he asked as a man untied himself from the spokes.

"Yes," came the answer. "Get the girl ashore, will you? She is about done." He pointed to the steering-gear box behind the wheel.

Lashed to one of the side staunchions that held the box in position was a white woman. Her hair was all adrift and hanging sodden about her shoulders. Her dress was torn open at the neck and breast, and her face was bloodlessly white. Sherwin could see she was young, a mere girl. She hung in her lashings in that limpless fashion that tells of unconsciousness.

There was a man fastened to the other side of the box, but Sherwin did not stop to more than glance at him. He called the natives and, when a dozen of them came running, he and Morton tenderly unlashed the girl. A sea swept over the after end of the wreck while they were at it, and they crouched and held on till it passed. Then they placed the limp form of the girl in the arms of four natives and shepherded them along the deck to the bow. Here, Sherwin found a piece of rope and made a bo'sun's-chair and the girl was carefully lowered to the beach.

"You look after her," said Morton. "I will take a couple of these niggers and fetch the mate." He

went aft again, three natives at his heels. Sherwin slipped over the side and went up the beach to where the girl was being carried.

As the natives laid their burden down, he found Bamu near him. "Here," he said, "you run longa house and bring bottle brandy from box under my bed. You savee that one? Brandy—firewater—mura-mura?" Bamu's eyes lit up with understanding. "I savee," he said, making off. "I savee that one mura-mura long time."

A crowd of women flocked round the girl lying on the sand. One brought a piece of wood and placed it under her head for a pillow. Others stroked her hair and touched her forehead curiously. Sherwin knelt down and felt her heart.

"Only fainted, I think," he said to himself. "Doesn't look like a case of partial drowning." He slipped his arm behind her shoulders, half-raised her and then bent her body forward so that her head hung between her knees. In a few minutes Bamu arrived with the brandy ready opened for use. Sherwin lifted the girl's head and forced a few drops of the spirit between her lips. Presently her eyes opened, looked round wonderingly for a moment, and closed again.

"Only a faint." Sherwin's tone was of distinct relief. "Here, Lapa, Wandi, Masi! You fellers are about the cleanest women in the village. You go longa this white misi to my house." He detailed four men to act as carriers and saw to it that they picked the girl up gently and carefully.

As they started off, Captain Morton, half-supporting the mate, came up.

"How is she?" were his first words.

"Nothing much the matter with her," Sherwin answered. "Merely a faint. The women will put her to bed straight away."

"That's good," said Morton. "The mate here got a crack on the head from a block, or something, when the mast went. He's still a bit groggy on his feet."

"Come to the house," Sherwin invited, taking the other arm of the stumbling mate. "A stiff nip of brandy will do him good—and you, too, I daresay."

Neither spoke again till they were a hundred yards along the beach. Then Sherwin asked hesitatingly and slowly:—

"Nobody else—on board?"

The Captain shook his head sorrowfully.

"No," he answered.

"The crew?"

There was a little silence. Then Morton said slowly:—

"They were sheltering high up the mainmast rigging——" His voice was so low that the trader strained his ears to hear above the roar of the surf. "They were good boys, too—Hula and Mana-Mana natives."

"Only three survivors!" Sherwin exclaimed on the intake of his breath. Then he was silent. He had a score of questions to ask—why had the captain lifted anchor instead of trying to ride out the wind? What had delayed him at Thursday Island so that he was so late in arriving? Who was the passenger, and whither was she bound? But he could not ask the man who had just lost his ship and his crew just then.

They caught up to the men carrying the girl as they reached the house. Sherwin called to one of the crowd of natives who had followed them from the village out of curiosity, to take his place in helping the mate. Then he took the girl from her bearers and carried her up the steps to his bed in the smaller of the two rooms. The cook-boy brought a lamp and Sherwin sent him to the store-room to see if there was a trade dress or anything that would serve as feminine attire. The boy returned and shook his head. "No find nothing," he said. "Store empty proper."

"This is a hard-up camp right enough," Sherwin said, looking round the room. The place was deco-

rated with all kinds of native weapons and ornaments. There were curiously carved dancing shields and face-masks, bundles of ceremonial arrows bone- and stone-tipped, wicker baskets and "dilly-bags," strings of small cowrie shells, woven body-belts. His eye fell on a finely plaited mat that was as supple as a cloak.

He pulled it down and handed it to the women who had followed him into the room.

"You feller put white misi to bed and put this round her. Savee? Look out you don't hurt her. Lapa, you got plenty savee, you show them other woman. Hang white misi's clothes in the wind so they dry quick."

Lapa nodded understandingly, and Sherwin went out and shut the door. Morton and the mate were on the verandah, the latter gazing about half-dazedly. Sherwin placed him in a canvas chair and called to the cook-boy to bring the brandy and glasses and a light. Bamu put the bottle of brandy on the table —he had been guarding it religiously all the time— and when the cook-boy brought a hurricane lamp, his master poured out a third of a glass and made the mate drink it. Then Morton had some.

"Sorry I can't offer you anything to smoke," Sherwin said as the Captain sat down. "I'm cut right out of all white-man stuff. There is only 'trade' tobacco, and you won't care about that."

"I don't care about smoking just now," Morton said gloomily. Sherwin cut up some of the rank, black tobacco and rammed it into his pipe. He heard the women moving about inside the house, and he wondered how they were getting on. The mate lay back in his chair with his eyes half-closed, and Morton sat with his hands clasped in front of him, staring into the darkness of the night. A number of natives crouched about the front of the house, talking softly. From portions he knew of their language. Sherwin knew they were discussing the wrecking of the "Mokohu."

"I'm sorry," Sherwin exclaimed presently. "I quite forgot! I'll root out some pyjamas and things for you two to change into." He made as though to rise, but the Captain restrained him.

"I'm all right," he said, somewhat gruffly, "and so is the mate. A drop of salt water won't hurt either of us. I am nearly dry anyway." He reached for the bottle. "I hope you don't mind?"

"Carry on," the trader said heartily. "I'll get you a change of clothes as soon as the women are finished with the girl and I can go into my room."

The brandy was not long in taking effect upon the mate, for soon his eyes opened full and he began to talk.

"Came a proper buster, eh?" he said in a pleasant voice. "How's Miss Russell?"

Sherwin guessed he was referring to the passenger and he answered. "Quite unhurt," he said. "How do you feel?"

"Stiff and sore and somewhat stupid," the other said with a ghost of a laugh. "I have not quite got the hang of things yet. Is that you, Skipper?" he asked, peering at the man opposite him.

"Yes," Morton said shortly.

"We've had a bit of bad luck, eh?"

"Yes." The Captain's tone was very abrupt.

"Can anything be done towards getting the schooner off again?"

It was Sherwin who answered this time. He saw that the Captain was not in a frame of mind for discussing anything connected with the loss of the "Mokohu"; the fate of his vessel was preying heavily upon him. "I am afraid not," he said gently. "She is right up in the village. She came ashore at the very top of the biggest spring tide we've had for six months or more, and it will be a long time before the water will rise to that height again. It's a good thing it was such a high tide, as a matter of fact; had it been an ordinary high-water, you would have stuck fast in the breakers and been smashed to bits

in no time. We could see you bumping as it was."

Lapa appeared as he finished speaking.

"Misi all right now," she said, and Sherwin rose at once.

"I will get you fellows some dry clothes," he said, and went into the house.

The girl was lying straight out in the bed, the blankets drawn close round her neck, and her hair was brought round to the front and spread over the coverlet. Sherwin, tip-toeing across the room to where a medley of clothes lay in a corner, stopped a moment to look at her. The bed stood in the centre of the room, and the mosquito-net was drawn back on one side. Sherwin stepped past the native women sitting on the floor and bent over the girl who had come ashore in such a ruthless fashion. It was evident she was breathing easily and regularly. A tinge of color showed in her cheeks. Sherwin laid his hand on her forehead to feel if she had a temperature, and the girl at once opened her eyes. She looked round in a startled fashion at the curios on the walls and the women on the floor. Then she suddenly sat upright, the blankets falling away and revealing the mat wrapped round her shoulders.

Sherwin pressed her gently back.

"You are all right," he said. "Go to sleep again. You are in safe hands."

"A white man," she whispered, turning her head so as to look at him. "I thought——" She stopped and drew her hand across her brow. Sherwin cursed himself for not having removed or covered the masks and things from the room; at first glance the girl would naturally think she had been captured by savages, or something of the sort, he reflected.

"There was such a big sea," the girl went on. "And a crash! I don't seem to remember any more. And I am so tired."

"Go to sleep again," Sherwin repeated. "These women will look after you. You are in safe hands, and don't need to worry."

She looked at him very steadily, an expression that told of her efforts to get matters straightened out in her mind, on her face.

"Is Har—Mr. Wilson, I mean—all right?" she asked. Despite the weakness of her voice, Sherwin detected a note of anxiety.

"Mr. Wilson?" he asked.

"The mate of the 'Mokohu,' you know."

"Oh, yes; he is quite safe and sound."

She closed her eyes and soon was fast asleep. Sherwin watched her for awhile and then whispered instructions to the women to give Miss Russell a drink should she awaken. Then he found a couple of suits of pyjamas and returned to the men on the verandah.

"She is doing well," he said, in answer to a question by the mate. "She should be quite all right by morning."

Morton and Wilson went into the other room and changed their clothes.

"I am sorry I can't offer you anything to eat," Sherwin said when they returned. "I'm right out of everything. Been living on native tucker for the last week."

"Lend me a couple of niggers," Captain Morton said, "and I'll go off to the schooner for some of the cabin stores. The tide is falling now, and it won't be very difficult to get the things."

Sherwin called the cook-boy to fetch Bamu and one or two others, and when they arrived he ordered them to accompany Morton.

"Better bring some of Miss Russell's things, too," Wilson called, as the Captain descended the steps. "She will want them in the morning."

"I was not going to forget that," Morton said, and swung through the compound, and off along the beach.

"The poor old chap is cut up over this business," Wilson said. "Although he is making a brave attempt to hide it, I know he is very worried. You

see, it's this way: We were ready to sail from Thursday Island when a wire came from Cooktown asking could we wait for the next steamer from south, as there was a passenger very anxious to get over to Port Moresby, and the 'Mokohu' would be the only vessel making the passage for over a month. The Skipper did not like losing the neaps, for the spring tides usually mean high winds at this time of the year. He did not want to wait and run the risk of bad weather in the Gulf of Papua, but when he reflected that a stranger, and a lady at that, would have a weary time awaiting the next vessel in Thursday Island, he decided to chance it."

"Very good of him," Sherwin commented.

"We got away the morning after the steamer arrived," Wilson went on, "and all was well till we began to approach the New Guinea coast. Then the sou'-easter came down wallop. Miss Russell got a dreadful doing with sea-sickness, and for two days did not eat anything. I felt very sorry for her, I can tell you." He stopped and gazed straight ahead for a few moments. The lamp was beside him, and it outlined his features clearly. Sherwin saw that he was a man of about his own age, strongly built, firm-mouthed and clear-complexioned. He saw, also, that his skin was unyellowed by fever and that his cheeks were rounded and full. Evidently Wilson was a stranger to fevers and island hardships, and Sherwin wondered where Morton had picked him up. There was something about this stranger that told of an easy, comfortable life.

"We did not stay long at Daru," Wilson said presently, "and bustled on here as quickly as possible. There was a thumping sea on, I can tell you, and the Skipper knew he was taking a risk in anchoring here at all. But he knew you would be short of stores and trade goods, so he decided to lie off at anchor and see what the surf was like in the morning. He is a good old chap, Morton; hates to see anybody put to inconvenience."

"He has always been like that," Sherwin put in. "Always ready to go to any amount of trouble on somebody else's behalf."

"So we let go in forty fathoms about three miles out. Everything would have been all right, but when the tide got into full swing, the wind, bad enough before, came down a howler. The Skipper lay down on the deck beside the anchor-windlass to listen for any snatching."

"She should not have dragged there," the trader said. "It's all good holding ground."

"She did not drag," Wilson said. "We had two anchors down and they held the ground all right. But suddenly the seas came too big for us, and first one cable parted, then the other. There was nothing for it then but to up sail and try and beat out. We lost a good deal of ground before the canvas was hoisted, and after the first tack it was evident that the leeway would beat us. Not enough sail, you know, and it was impossible to give her more—she would never have carried it. We slogged on, tack for tack, sailing across the wind, and every sea hitting us nearly abeam and adding to the leeway."

"Then Captain Morton, seeing the schooner would strike the surf beam-on, decided to run her ashore bow first, and so save some of the lives on board, even if the vessel was lost?"

Wilson nodded. "The niggers climbed into the mainmast rigging and we three Europeans lashed ourselves to the steering gear. The rest you know better than I do."

Sherwin related how he and the natives had watched the "Mokohu" come through the surf and strike the beach. He told of the loss of the mast and the crew and the saving of Miss Russell. Wilson's face lengthened towards the end.

"And the 'Mokohu' is a complete wreck, you say?" he asked.

"No hope of salving her. Her back is broken for a certainty."

"Then I am completely and utterly broke," Wilson said, but not very despondently. "I am, or was, part owner of her. I put all I had in the world into her."

"Part-owner!" exclaimed the trader.

"I've been dodging round about Thursday Island for the last three or four months looking for a suitable investment for a few hundred pounds I had left to me. The tropics have always had a fascination for me, you know. I investigated the pearling industry, trepang-fishing, and one or two other things in Torres Strait, but they all needed more capital than I could raise. Then the 'Mokohu' came in from Moresby, and the Skipper let it drop that he was looking for a working partner. I had had a bit of small-boat experience round about Sydney, and the result of a couple of conversations with Morton was that I invested my money and signed on as mate. There was a mortgage on the 'Mokohu,' which my ready cash cleared off, and we sailed out of Thursday Island's harbor in a ship completely our own. Rotten luck to lose her so soon, isn't it?"

"A bit stiff," the trader agreed. "And who is Miss Russell?"

Wilson's face lit up at once.

"She is the sister of a chap who has a plantation —coconuts, or rubber or something—away the other side of Port Moresby. She came up from Sydney to visit him. And, my word, she's a great girl!" he added enthusiastically. "If you had seen the way she stood the thumping of the seas and refused to show any fear! And she's that gentle and nice and sweet——"

He stopped abruptly as Captain Morton, followed by a number of natives carrying bundles and packages, appeared at the steps.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEA GOES DOWN

Some time during the night the wind began to ease up. At daylight it was blowing no more than a good sailing breeze. The sun rose bright and clear in a sky devoid of clouds, and the half-circle of sea horizon was regular and sharply defined. The thunder of the surf was distant and lessened, for the tide was low and the nearest breakers a quarter of a mile from the shore.

Morton and Wilson had retired immediately after a meal of the cabin stores. They lay upon stretchers on the verandah, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, relaxation after their strenuous time in the surf falling heavily upon them. Sherwin had not gone to bed at all. Right through the night he had lain on a mat outside the door of the bedroom, ready in case Miss Russell should awaken and want anything. But the girl did not stir, and at daylight Lapa reported she was still asleep.

"Weather's changed for the better," Sherwin said, cheerily, as the others got up. "It's going to be fine for awhile."

"The change is a few hours too late," Morton said gloomily. "If it had kept on blowing for another month it would not have affected me."

Sherwin was shocked at the appearance of the man. On his last trip from Thursday Island Morton had been a breezy, jovial kind of man, always ready with a smile and a bright remark. His good nature was a byword along the coast, and the cheerfulness with which he would go out of his way to assist another made him the friend of trader, missionaries, natives and all.

But now his face was drawn and thin, and the light gone from his eyes. He seemed ten years older, and

the tone of his voice was harsh and aged. A flood of pity welled up in Sherwin's breast as he looked at him. He produced the brandy and poured out a quarter of a glass.

"Take this," he said. "It will cheer you up. You are not utterly ruined, you know; there's the insurance."

Morton took the glass with shaky fingers and drank it off.

"I can't put in a claim," he said. "I had no right to anchor so close to a lee shore. No insurance company will take risks like that. And, besides, what's insurance? What's the money compared to the 'Mokohu?'—the vessel I had built to my own design, the thing I loved like a child? There was not a better or stauncher craft on the coast, not one. I knew her inside out, and all her little tricks and ways." He sat down on the stretcher and wrung his hands. "And now she's gone! And with her the best native crew ever a man had!"

Sherwin looking up, happened to meet Wilson's eyes. Both looked away quickly, embarrassed; the Captain's grief affecting them very deeply. To create a diversion the trader called his cook-boy to hurry the breakfast, and when the boy replied that it was all ready and waiting, the three men got up and went to the table at the end of the verandah.

There was not much conversation during the meal. Nobody felt inclined for talk, and beyond Sherwin remarking that Miss Russell had slept well, they were for the most part silent.

They were almost finished when Lapa came out of the bedroom and approached.

"Eye belong misi come open," she said.

"She want to get up?" Sherwin asked, and when Lapa nodded her tousled head, he went on:—"You feller help misi dress. Tell her I will send cookie with some kai-kai when she ready. Then you and them other woman go longa kitchen and get your breakfasts."

Morton rose as Lapa vanished into the room. "Come on, Wilson," he said. "We will go and have a look at the schooner and see what can be done about getting the cargo out of her. I hope, for your sake, Sherwin, that your goods are not completely ruined," he added, with a touch of his old self in his tone.

Sherwin accompanied them to the steps. "I'll get all the village to work on her, directly," he said. "I'll just see that Miss Russell is all right and then come along."

On the ground, Wilson turned and looked up at the trader standing on the verandah.

"You might tell her I was asking for her, will you?" he said, his eyes shining. "I——" he stopped abruptly and, turning, strode after Morton.

Sherwin stood watching the two pyjama-clad figures wind through the coconuts and turn on to the beach.

"I am afraid there is an understanding, or something approaching to it, between the mate and the passenger," he said to himself, with a laugh. "They haven't lost much time seeing they've only known each other a few days." He leaned over the railing and watched the lines of white-topped breakers and the scurry of the receding seas frothing and bubbling back over the sand. The sea was still heaving and rolling, the succession of waves still endless. But now it moved with an easy regularity that had little more than a hint of the angry chaos of yesterday. Beyond the breakers was a broad expanse of blue, flecked by a dash of white as the wind took the top off an occasional roller. The beach gleamed grey-white in the brightness of the early-morning light, a brown line high up on the sand marking where the tide had been during the night. A flock of sea-birds, flying low, swooped down on small fish in the backwash, and away to the westward a score of frigate-birds hung motionless against a background of clear sky.

It was the sort of morning that makes a healthy

man want to shout his joy at being alive; when the beauty of blending color and the tang of salt air intoxicates like wine. But the man leaning over the verandah-rail was looking without seeing. It had suddenly occurred to him that there was something wanting in his life. It was a vague, indefinite kind of want, and it worried him that he could not clearly make out what it was. Peter Sherwin was a man of action, and as such, accustomed to knowing exactly what he wanted, and taking the most direct means of going after it. Ten years of trading in the Gulf of Papua; of going long canoe journeys up little frequented rivers in search of sandalwood or native "trade," such as dog's teeth, toyya shells, beetlenut and skins for drum-making; wading through miles of black, mangrove mud amongst the delta villages of the Purari; of bartering with strange chiefs who played seeming fair in the daytime and planned to get their copra and vine-rubber back at night; all this builds up a man's self-reliance and makes his actions, thoughts and desires purposeful and decisive. But for once Peter Sherwin was floundering in the restless sea of not knowing what he wanted.

A light step and a voice interrupted his train of thought.

"I must apologise for sleeping in so long."

He turned to find Miss Russell beside him. She was dressed in a blouse and skirt of creamy white, and her hair was coiled back upon her head. Sherwin wondered why he had not noticed before that her hair was of that particular shade of brown streaked with bronze that he had always admired in colored pictures of girls in magazines.

"I never slept so soundly before," the girl went on. "I remember you speaking to me when I awoke in the room, but from then on I might have been dead for all I remember."

Sherwin bowed and smiled. "If you will only add that you are hungry I will know you are perfectly recovered," he said.

"And so I am," she laughed, and the man noticed how her eyes sparkled. "I believe it was hunger that awakened me."

Sherwin led the way to the table, and the cook-boy set out a meal of preserved meat, cabin biscuits, and black coffee.

"I am afraid it's all I can offer you for the present," Sherwin said, as the girl sat down and began. "Even this is stuff Captain Morton brought from the cabin of the 'Mokohu.' I have run right out of everything."

Miss Russell put down her knife and fork.

"I am so sorry for poor Captain Morton," she said slowly. "It was so good of him to wait for me at Thursday Island—and then to have this happen! I feel I am to blame; had he not waited for me the 'Mokohu' would not have missed the fine weather." She sat with her hands on the table, an expression of infinite sorrow in her eyes. "I—I did not mean to be any trouble."

"Of course you didn't," Sherwin said cheerfully. "And you are no more to blame for the loss of the 'Mokohu' than I am. Please don't talk about such a thing. Now go on and eat your breakfast."

She resumed her meal at that, and for a little while there was silence. Sitting right opposite her Sherwin took advantage of the occasion to examine her more particularly. Her face was finely moulded and attractive, he decided, and there was an expression of firmness that pleased him. Her head and neck were well poised and her shoulders had just the right angle of slope. Her hands were long and thin and sensitive-looking, and while her whole appearance was of daintiness there was an entire absence of anything to suggest the spoilt and petted butterfly. A sense of shame suddenly came over Sherwin as he realised he had been criticising her as he would have a horse offered for sale.

"I suppose I ought to introduce myself," he said presently. "My name is Peter Sherwin, and this is

my trading station at the mouth of the Wallala River."

The girl held out her hand. "My name is Ellen Russell, of Sydney, on my way to my brother's place at Hula, wherever that is." Sherwin took her hand and shook it. "It sounds awfully formal, doesn't it?" the girl asked with a little laugh, the worried and sorrowful lines gone from her face. Sherwin was immensely relieved to hear that laugh; a few moments before he had noticed a lump rising in her throat and her eyes begin to redden suspiciously—and he would have been hard put to it to know what to do with a weeping woman.

"Are the others not up yet?" she asked, after awhile.

"Morton and Wilson? Oh, yes; they are at the schooner, now. We are going to start getting the cargo out of her presently."

Ellen jumped up. "May I come with you, Mr. Sherwin? I might be of some use, you know."

"Do you feel strong enough?" he asked doubtingly. "I think you should lie down and rest."

But the girl would not hear of such a thing. "I am not going to loaf about while there is work to be done," she exclaimed. "Perhaps I could count the cases, or something. I know I will be useful—and I do so want to help," she added almost pathetically.

"Come on then," Sherwin said, and picked up an umbrella. "Take this to keep the sun off you."

He helped her down the steps, for she was stiff and sore from the knocking about she had received.

"I've got a hundred questions to ask you," she said as they went through the coconuts to the beach. "This place seems full of interest. There are those strange, silent women who waited on me all through the night and helped me to dress this morning. I want to find out how they live and what they do. They are savages, aren't they?"

"Yes, more or less. Just about here the natives are fairly tame, but in some of the places I visit

at times they are apt to be tricky. You will see the village where those women live in a few moments. The 'Mokohu' is ashore right in front of the houses."

She showed herself very bright and eager as they went along the beach, and she laughed heartily at the antics of a tiny, grey crab that dodged about her feet. She stopped to look at the thousands of red-backed soldier-crabs marching and wheeling with military-like precision on the wet sand, and she expressed wonderment and delight when her companion informed her they always kept their respective positions, and when he pointed out the officers and other leaders. She picked up pieces of broken coral that had been swept up from the reefs away to the westward, and tiny shells patterned in a hundred designs.

Sherwin glanced at her from time to time. There was something strange in the interest she was taking at such a time, he thought. Then it occurred to him that she was endeavoring to keep her mind off the disaster to the "Mokohu;" that she was trying to bear up and be brave. And, somehow, the thought pleased him.

They found the schooner high and dry, fully fifty yards from the nearest of the seas. She was sitting upright in the sand, the violence of the impact having forced her to make a bed for herself. In the full light of day she looked a pitiful wreck. Her sides were bulged and bent, the ends of splintered planks protruding here and there. There was no vestige of bulwarks, cookhouse or deckgear of any sort excepting the wheel. Even the anchor-windlass was gone as completely as though it had never existed.

Morton and Wilson hailed Sherwin and the girl from the deck.

"Collect those niggers, will you, Sherwin?" the Captain said. "We'll get to work straight away while the tide is right out. The cargo is more or less undamaged, thank goodness."

"He's been like that ever since I knew him," the

trader said to the girl. "He is cut to the heart about the loss of his vessel—yet he is glad the property of other people entrusted to his care is safe. The man is pure gold all through."

"I know—I know," whispered Ellen with a half-sob. "He is a perfect dear. It only makes it harder for me when I think——" She broke off and hid her face in her hands.

"Don't," said Sherwin, attempting to comfort her. "Be brave! You must not give way!"

Morton jumped down from the deck and came running, Wilson close behind.

"What's the matter, Miss?" the Skipper asked. "Don't grieve, everything will be all right." He patted her head and tried to take her hand. "Don't worry, my dear. Keeping cheerful is the main thing in life."

Ellen looked up at him, her eyes streaming.

"If you had not waited for me this would not have happened," she sobbed.

Morton laughed—a great hearty laugh alive with good humor.

"Something worse might have happened," he said. "Why, we might have all been drowned! Who can tell what wouldn't have happened if something else hadn't happened? Dry your eyes, my dear, and let us see you smile."

Ellen took the Captain's large red fist in her hand and squeezed it tightly. Then she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"You are a dear, a perfect dear!" she cried, her eyes shining again.

Morton disengaged her arms gently. "Nonsense," he said with a mock roughness. "Now run along with Sherwin to the village and help him to rustle up a mob of hard-working niggers—if there are such things."

CHAPTER V.

ELLEN BEARS A HAND

The village consisted of about eighty houses built mainly in one long row facing the sea. Here and there one straggled a bit out of line, and a couple more were distinguished by having been built at the rear of the others. Each was constructed of palm-thatch, high off the ground, with a crazy-looking ladder leading up to a tiny porch or verandah.

A score of naked youngsters of both sexes followed Sherwin and Ellen into the village, their eyes big with wonder and curiosity at the sight of this strange white woman who had come out of the sea. Not one was bold enough to get in front of her, but they all crowded up behind her as near as possible. Once or twice Ellen felt a timid hand touch her dress, but she did not look round, knowing they would at once scamper in fear.

"Poor little creatures!" she said. "They don't know what to make of me, I'm sure."

"I don't suppose they do," Sherwin laughed. "Which is not very remarkable considering you are the first white woman they have ever seen. Here come the chiefs to do you homage, now."

They were in the centre of the village by this time and three old men were approaching from the direction of the Dubu, or meeting-house. They stopped in front of the two whites and distorted their features into what were evidently meant to be smiles of greeting. Each wore a wisp of calico about his middle and circlets of woven grass on his legs and arms. They wore no nose ornaments, but from their ears hung pendants of small shells.

"To-morrow, Taubada (Master)," said one. "To-morrow."

Sherwin laughed and shook the old fellow's hand.

"That is the only English word he knows," he explained. "He thinks it means 'good-day' or something similar. He works it off on me quite proudly every time we meet."

"He wants to be friendly," Ellen murmured. "Shall I shake hands with him, too?"

"Not unless you wish."

"I do wish," she said, and took the hand of each chief in turn. "I believe they are quite pleased with themselves," she added as the men nodded and grunted approvingly.

In a strange mixture of pidgin-English and native words Sherwin told the chiefs that people were wanted at once to work at the schooner. They waved their hands, uttured a guttural sentence or two and went away.

"They will have the whole village at the wreck in a few minutes," Sherwin said. "While we are waiting, let me show you the houses and how the niggers live."

They went along the palm-shaded street, the crowd of curious youngsters still at their heels. On the verandahs of the houses women were sitting cross-legged weaving grass baskets or threading necklaces of shells and yellow beans. Others squatted on the ground husking coconuts and splitting the hard shells open to get at the pure white flesh within. All wore the waist-to-knee grass petticoat of their race, and about their necks and arms were shell and bone ornaments. In the fuzzy hair of some of the younger women and girls were pink convolvulus flowers and blood-red leaves of the spiral croton.

As they laughed and talked amongst themselves, Ellen remarked that their teeth were almost jet black.

"Chewing beetlenut does that," Sherwin explained. "The lime they mix with the nut eats away the enamel."

"What a pity!" Ellen exclaimed. "It quite spoils their appearance."

"They don't think so. It's all a matter of taste. Black teeth are regarded amongst these natives as an aid to beauty."

He took her into one or two of the houses, a dozen willing black hands helping her up the shaky ladders and through the narrow openings in the thatch that answered as doorways. The houses were windowless and the interiors dark and dismal.

"What a dreadfully musty smell!" Ellen said, as she stood in the centre of a house that was evidently the living place of pigs, dogs and humans combined. "It almost makes me sick."

Sherwin lit a match and held it over his head.

"You would hardly believe the medley of stuff they collect in their houses," he said, taking the match first to one corner, then to another. "And there is absolutely no ventilation."

In one corner was a heap of half-dried coconut, some of it mouldy and crumbling, some of it smoke-colored and brown. Suspended by a stick over a small fire that burnt on a heap of sand in the centre of the floor were a number of pieces of fish that were none too fresh, and piled against the wall were heaps of yams and sweet-potatoes, just as they had been dumped out of the women's baskets, and with the earth still clinging to them. From the rafters hung fishing nets with weights of cowrie shells and floats of a light, almost pithy, wood sometimes used for canoe-making. Beside the doorway stood a bundle of arrows and a pair of heavy bows with strings of cane that had been split fine and closely woven. Sherwin took the arrows into the better light of the porch and explained their uses to Ellen.

He told how the long, willowy, undecorated ones were used for hunting wallabies and other game, and he showed her the elaborately carved ceremonial weapons. Some of these latter were covered for half

their length with series after series of mitre-like affairs not unlike chess-men, here and there interspersed with sharp prongs that lay close to the shaft and sloped away from the point.

"Different arrows for different uses," he said. "The man-killing one is not used in hunting, and the ceremonial weapon is used in neither."

"But why do they go to such trouble?" Ellen asked, fingering a long carved arrow with a venomous-looking point of cassowary bone. "Look at this one. It is only used for killing men, you say. Why is it carved so elaborately? The plain arrow that is used for hunting could kill a man as well as a wallaby."

Sherwin laughed. "I have often thought the same thing. But natives have their own ideas on such matters. If a man makes up his mind to kill a certain individual, he will carefully and at great pains make an arrow for the purpose, and for that purpose alone. No other one must be used. It is quite useless trying to find out the reason of these things. There are some things at the back of the native mind that no white will ever learn."

A crowd of natives was flocking through the coconuts to the schooner as the man and girl climbed down the ladder to the ground.

"The chiefs have not lost any time," said Sherwin. "We had better leave inspecting the rest of the village till another time."

"I don't know that I want to see the inside of any more houses," Ellen said as they reached the beach. "They smell so. What would happen if an epidemic broke out? The poor things would die like flies."

Sherwin became very grave all at once. "That's a thing I am very frightened of. The natives have no power of resistance when it comes to sickness; they just lie down and die. They are fatalists in a

way, and firmly believe that no efforts of theirs will save them once they are stricken."

"The poor things! Could not precautions be taken? Ventilation, sanitation——"

"Please don't talk about it," the man interrupted. "I am rather touchy on the subject of epidemics just now, for, as a matter of fact, there has been an outbreak of rubeola—German measles, you know—in some of the villages to the eastward, and—well, I've seen a disease sweep a village before, and I don't want to see it again."

The girl was silent for a few yards, then she looked up at the man by her side and said softly:

"You are not what my idea of a trader was like. I believe you take a deep interest in the welfare of your natives."

"Why should I not?" Sherwin asked quickly. "These people provide me with my means of making a living. I want to see them strong and healthy, otherwise they could not work and make copra to sell me."

"That's not the only reason," said the girl. "And I am so glad."

They were at the wreck now and there was no more time for uninterrupted conversation. Work had already begun, and the natives swarmed over the stranded vessel. The hatch-covers were off, and bales and bundles and cases were being passed over the side by means of ropes and slings. Sherwin scrambled on board and went to where Morton and Wilson were standing on the cargo directing the work.

"I think you had better send the stuff to my storeroom," he suggested. "If it is left on the beach the temptation might be too much for the villagers. When the store is full, we can stack a lot under the living house."

"Thanks," Morton said. "I thought of that, but did not like to suggest it. Will you attend to the storing while we get the stuff out?"

"Right. Miss Russell has volunteered to act as tally-clerk, so we should get the work done quickly."

Wilson, who was working with a bale-hook and showing three naked natives where to get a grip on a large case, looked up quickly. "She's a great girl, isn't she?" he asked. "Ready, willing and sympathetic, and plucky, too. Some women would not have got over the shock of all this for a month. I do like a sensible, matter-of-fact girl."

Sherwin smiled inwardly.

"I am afraid you are very much in love, young man," he said to himself as he went to the bow and climbed down to the sand. Ellen was standing where he had left her, a dozen native women around her, some touching her dress, others pointing to her face and whispering wonderingly to one another at the whiteness of her skin. With the white of her dress in sharp relief to the dark-skinned bodies around her, the clearness of her skin, the sunlight playing with the bronze in her hair, the daintiness of her, she looked like some fairy queen surrounded by slaves.

"And I don't wonder at it, Mr. Wilson," Sherwin added as he reached her side.

He explained what was to be done, and then marshalled forty natives—men and women—and set them carrying the first of the discharged goods along the beach. Bamu came up as the string started off.

"Here, where have you been all the morning?" Sherwin questioned roughly. "Asleep?"

The old native shook his head.

"No more," he answered. "I been clean out storeroom. He all ready now."

Sherwin patted him on the back. "You are a funny old coot. Who told you to clean out the store."

"Nobody tell me. I savee cargo belong you all right and I make ready some place to put him."

"All right, then. You stop here now and see all these people carry everything proper. Savee? I go house and look out for stacking all the things. You boss for this end."

Bamu swung around at once and began directing some men who were struggling with a case.

"I think that is just splendid," Ellen said, as she and the trader set off for the house. "Fancy that old man cleaning out the store without being told! It was very thoughtful of him. Have you many natives like that?"

"Bamu is a funny old fellow," Sherwin laughed. "He has been with me for years, and knows everything about the station better than I do. When he saw that the 'Mokohu' was ashore with her hull intact, he knew my cargo would be more or less undamaged. So he just went to work and cleaned out the store as a matter of course."

"I think you must treat your natives very well for them to behave like that," Ellen remarked. "You must be a kind master."

"I hope not! Kindness is a mistake—indiscriminate kindness, at any rate—in dealing with natives. They mistake it for weakness."

"Then you must be a just one."

"I try to be, but one's ideas become warped by long residence in countries like this, and it is often hard to tell when one is right. I do my best."

"I am sure you do." Her tone was emphatic. "I believe you regard the natives as human beings, and not as creatures belonging to another order, as some traders and others are supposed to do."

"I have met very few who hold with that idea," Sherwin said. "It's a foolish one in any case. A trader or planter depends on his labor, as on nothing else, for successful results, and that being so he sensibly makes fair treatment his first rule. I certainly do so—not from sentiment, but from business."

Ellen laughed and looked up at him. "You are trying to make yourself out to be a hard-hearted sort of person who gives fair treatment only because it pays. But it won't work; I know better."

The first of the carriers had already deposited their loads in front of the storehouse when they

reached the station. Sherwin told off a dozen men for the stacking, and Ellen obtained an exercise-book and a pencil and sat down on a box. As the trader called out the various brands and marks the girl noted them down, and then the goods were bundled inside and stacked.

Lapa and the other women who had waited on Ellen when she was unconscious volunteered to lend a hand, and Sherwin put them on to some of the lighter stuff. It was hard, straining work, for some of the cargo was heavy and awkward; but the men worked well and uncomplainingly, and when the time came for the midday spell and meal, Sherwin felt very satisfied with the morning's work.

"The owners of this stuff might have to wait a month or two till a vessel can come for it," he said, as he sent a boy to tell Morton and Wilson to come for lunch. "But it will be quite safe till then. I hope none of them are in a hurry for the stuff. I see there are cases of tomahawks and half-axes for the Mana-Mana plantations, and a ton of tobacco for Robertson, the trader, at Lohu. If the plantations are short of axes and Robertson is out of tobacco, there will be some cursing going on just now. However, we are doing the best we can."

The others came along presently, and all four had their lunch at the verandah table. Morton was in a much better humor than he had been in the night before, and he cracked jokes and made more or less sly allusions to the liking Wilson and Ellen had evidenced for one another on the run from Thursday Island. Sherwin noticed that the girl blushed at these remarks, and tried desperately to turn the conversation. But this only made the Captain the more determined on his fun, and Ellen at last showed such signals of distress that Sherwin felt in mercy bound to create a change of topic.

"We will have to let the authorities know about the loss of the 'Mokohu' as soon as possible," he

said. "Shall I arrange for a native to go with a message, Captain?"

"How far is it?" Ellen asked, before Morton had time to answer.

"A good boy would get through in about ten days," the trader said. "There is a decent beach most of the way."

"What a distance for one man to travel!" Ellen exclaimed. "Is there not some way by which the letter could be carried from village to village, in relays, I think that's the term?"

Sherwin's face was grave at once. "That would be the course in ordinary circumstances," he said slowly. "But things are out of gear just now, and I have made an order that no native is to come here from beyond a certain point to the eastward. The man who takes the letter must not return here for some time."

"Why?" the others asked in one voice.

Sherwin paused a moment before replying. His face was set and lines of care and worry appeared suddenly on his brow.

"The German measles is raging along the coast to the eastward. To prevent the infection spreading here I have prohibited all the natives on the other side of the Basi river coming across. That means that a native crossing from this side will not be allowed to return."

"And will they obey?"

Sherwin smiled grimly. "I am the only trader for a hundred miles of coast, and the natives know better than to fall foul of me. There is no one else to buy their copra and supply them with goods." He waved his hands expressively. "So, you see, I am not likely to be disobeyed. The plan of sending to Moresby by relays is not to be considered. But I can order a man to go right through and instruct a friend in Moresby to keep him there till this epidemic has passed."

Captain Morton stood up and felt for his pipe. "No

need to send a nigger at all," he said. "As master of the ship it is my duty to report the loss of the vessel in person, if possible. As soon as the cargo is safely out of her, I will go to Moresby."

"But what an awful journey!" Ellen exclaimed.

"It's nothing! I'll take it in easy stages. I made up my mind to go as soon as I got safe ashore. Now, let us get at the cargo again."

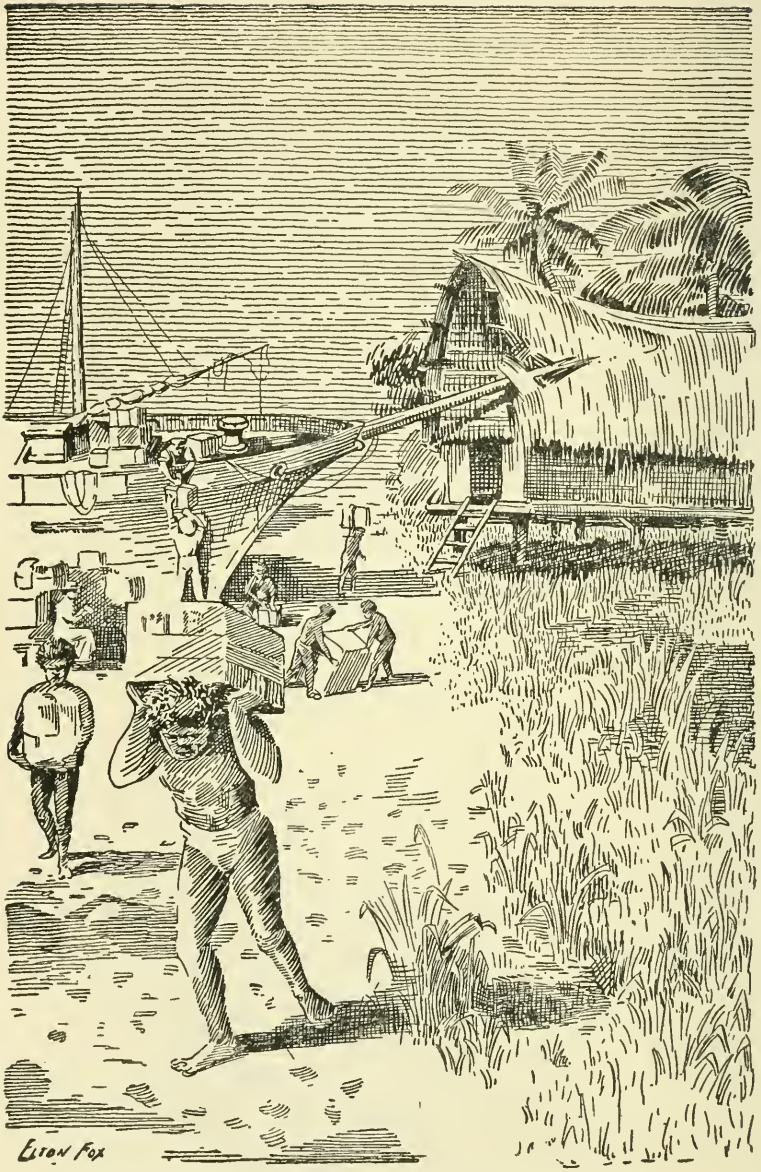
They all went to the steps, and, when they reached the ground, Morton took Sherwin aside out of the hearing of the others.

"Thanks for the offer of a nigger, Sherwin," he said. "It was very good of you. I did think of taking Wilson with me." He stopped and looked quizzically at the other. "But I thought it would be better to leave him to look after the cargo—the cargo, you understand," he repeated, digging the trader playfully in the ribs, a broad smile on his face. "Poor young things," he added, with a mock sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

TALK OF SORCERY

For a matter of three days they worked at getting the cargo out and carried to the station, and at the end of that time the schooner was empty and the bottom of her hold littered with packing-waste. The weather continued fine, the wind dying away at night and, after a period of calm, coming off the land in the form of a light air that hardly rustled the cocoanuts and brought with it the odors of the inland swamps. The surf had died down to an ordered



"Ellen obtained an exercise book and pencil and sat down on a box."

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sequence of small rollers that rose to their greatest height at the flood of the tide and fell away to ripples at the ebb. The sun each day floated in an immensity of blue—a blue so delicate and yet so clear, so distant and yet so near, that it seemed the very spirit —the poetry—of a tint. The storehouse was filled to overflowing, and the space under the living house was piled high with cases of all sizes and shapes. There were hundreds of bags and mats of rice, caddys of tobacco, "nests" of camphor-wood boxes with brass-clipped corners and made so that three smaller sizes fitted in one large one, bags of potatoes and onions, two motor engines for launches belonging to some of the plantations to the eastward, dozens of bundles of empty bags for the various trading stations, scores of cases of preserved meats, jams, milk and fruits, tightly soldered tins of flour and sugar for the mountain mining fields. Then there was a medley of spare and other ship gear—sails, anchors and chains, windlasses, spars, coils of rope of various sizes, cabin-fittings and what not.

"I never knew what a lot of stuff a ship could hold before," Ellen said, as she and Sherwin stood looking at the last loads being stacked under the house. "It's a whole town-full!"

"We have to get both a variety and a quantity of requirements in these parts," Sherwin said. "We can't run to the corner shop when we get short. It's a matter of looking a long way ahead."

That night Ellen produced her tally-book, and she and Captain Morton compared the entries with those of the shipping receipts and manifest, in order to see that everything shipped at Thursday Island had been landed safely. Sherwin and Wilson lounged on the canvas chairs, conversing desultorily. Both directly faced the pair at the table, and the trader could not help comparing the grey and somewhat scanty hair of the Captain with the beautiful head so close to it, and remarking inwardly on the white-

ness of the girl's hand alongside the browned fist of her companion.

The comparing of the entries was a long job, for the items were numerous and some of the brands hard to decipher. After a time Sherwin and Wilson rose, by mutual instinct, and the former suggested a walk along the beach. Wilson readily agreed, and the pair slipped away without disturbing the Captain and the girl.

"I don't like the idea of the Skipper taking on that long walk to Moresby," Wilson said, as they passed through the coconuts and reached the clean sand of the beach. "He is not as young as he used to be, and I know it will knock him up. But he won't hear of me going and letting him stay here. He insists it is his duty as master of the vessel to go."

"Of course, he knows best," Sherwin said. "But it looks to me as if a letter carried by a nigger would answer the purpose just as well."

For a time the two men walked in silence, each sucking meditatively at his pipe. The night was very still, for the land breeze had not yet sprung up and the coconuts drooped motionless in the starlight. The tide was rising, but the beat of the surf was subdued and gentle, a patter as of running footsteps and a miniature crash that had a musical tinkle. Ahead a number of fires glowed and occasionally flared amongst the coconuts of the village, and the shadowy shape of the "Mokohu" sprawled across the beach like some prehistoric animal resting, the stump of the mainmast looking like a dorsal horn. A murmur of native voices floated on the night air, and now and then came the note of a softly beaten drum.

"What do you think of Miss Russell?" Wilson asked presently.

"A very fine girl indeed," his companion answered promptly. "I like her immensely. She is capable and sensible and——"

"Yes," interrupted Wilson. "I was never so

pleased about anything as when I learnt she had come safely through the surf. She would make a splendid wife."

"The man who gets such beauty and goodness for his own will be a very lucky individual." Sherwin's tone was very earnest. "I have only known her for three days, but so much is obvious."

"I recognised her good qualities as soon as she stepped on board at Thursday Island." He puffed at his pipe meditatively. "Ever think of marrying, Sherwin?" he asked, off-handedly.

"Poor young fellow," the trader said to himself. "He is evidently very much in love, and wants to work the conversation so as to get my opinion of ——" He cut short his train of thought and said aloud: "Marrying? No hope! Isolated traders like me don't harbor thoughts of such a thing. It would be no life for any girl."

"Some girls would revel in it. Miss Russell, for instance."

Sherwin laughed heartily. "For about three months, perhaps; then the glamor would begin to wear off and a longing for civilisation and drapers' shops and the company of women of her own color would start making her life a misery. Besides, white women don't thrive in this climate."

"None of those things would matter if you loved and were loved."

"You seem to know a good deal about it," the trader laughed. "I suspect you of possessing experience."

Wilson hesitated. "I—I—I, well, you see, I have not lived an isolated existence like you. My life has been spent in civilisation—and one has all sorts of experiences, you know."

"All I know about the business," said Sherwin, "is that I do not love and am not loved, and that I'm fairly happy in spite of it. This open, free life agrees with me, and I have no desire to change it or burden myself with a wife."

"All that's wrong with you is that you haven't met a girl who appealed to you. Some day you will; then you will go whop-oh!"

As they turned to retrace their steps, Ellen and Morton appeared.

"We've got the business finished!" the girl exclaimed. "And I'm not sorry. The Captain suggested a walk to see where you two had got to. Listen! What is that?"

A strange wailing and howling was coming from the direction of the village, the voices of women rising to a shrill falsetto that quavered weirdly, the droning deeper note of men chanting in chorus.

Sherwin turned abruptly. "The epidemic?" he whispered anxiously.

A native came running along the beach.

"What is it?" the trader questioned, as the man stood panting before them.

"We feller find them!"

"Find what?"

"We feller been go longa creek for to look fish"—he waved his arm back past the village—"and we smell some'ting longa mangroves. We look close to and we findem."

Sherwin shook the native roughly. "Hurry up! What did you find?"

But the man preferred to tell his story in his own way.

"Some shark been take leg and arm and——"

"Here, tell me what you are talking about at once, or I'll——"

The anger and threat in Sherwin's voice pulled the native up with a round turn.

"Them crew boy belong 'Mokohu,'" he said simply.

Ellen screamed and staggered, and Wilson, who was the nearest, was just in time to catch her as she crumpled up in a faint. "Better take her to the house at once," said Sherwin, as Wilson laid his

burden gently on the sand. Ellen stirred slightly and moaned.

"She is coming round, I think; it's only a momentary faint," Morton said, bending over her.

The girl's eyes opened and she looked up. The wailing in the village had increased in volume and the drums had broken into a sharp staccato.

"Take me away, please," she said weakly. "I feel so sick."

"You take her to the house, Sherwin," said Morton, rising. "We will come along afterwards."

"Make those niggers stop their howling," Sherwin said, as he assisted Ellen to her feet. "These death wails get on one's nerves."

He slipped his arm round the girl's waist and the pair set off for the house, Morton and Wilson going in the direction of the village.

"I am sure you must think I am very foolish," Ellen said, as they reached the steps. "That turn came over me so suddenly that I had not time to resist it."

"Don't worry about that," Sherwin said gently. "You must lie down for awhile." He helped her on to the verandah and to the door of her room.

"I think I would rather sit on the verandah, if you don't mind," she said. "I would like to wait till the others return."

He dragged a stretcher forward and smoothed the blankets on it and placed a pillow comfortably.

Ellen lay down and looked at the man for some time without speaking. The wailing was dying down now, and there was only an occasional drum-note. From the region of the living quarters of the natives belonging to the station came Bamu's voice, loud-toned and evidently in expostulation.

"I have been dreaming about those poor boys," Ellen whispered presently. "In my sleep I saw their bodies tossed about by the waves, rolling over and over, tumbling——" She hid her face in her hands. "Only last night I woke up in a cold sweat——"

"Please don't think of it any more," Sherwin murmured sympathetically. "Try and go to sleep now."

"I can't—I'm afraid to! I dream and dream——"

Again she buried her face in her hands. Sherwin rose and went into the bedroom. He returned with a stoppered bottle of tabloids, one of which he powdered and added to a half-glass of water.

"Drink this!" he said authoritatively.

She took the glass obediently and drained it.

"Merely a harmless opiate," he said in answer to the enquiry in her eyes. For a time she lay looking at him; then an expression of infinite weariness crept over her face and her eyes closed.

Sherwin pulled out his pipe and lit it.

"That nigger delivered his horrible news with too much suddenness altogether," he muttered. "No wonder she fainted; I got a bit of a shock myself. Still, I might have known what was coming."

There was a creak along the verandah, and on the trader calling out who was there, the figure of Bamu stepped into the circle of light.

"You hear news?" he queried, his wrinkled face looking as though it were a hundred years old in the lamplight. Sherwin nodded and bade him speak softly, so as not to disturb the sleeping girl.

"Them feller in village want to make one big death-dance," Bamu went on. "Two feller chief been here jus' now and talk to me. I tell them no can make big dance. I tell them you wild like hell!"

"That's right. The bodies must be buried at once and without any dance." Sherwin knew that a big death-dance would run into several days, perhaps weeks—an orgy of dancing and feasting and chanting, during the currency of which there would be no copra made, and at the end would leave the natives exhausted and worn out. And just now he wanted his natives to keep as strong and fit as possible. The dreaded rubeola was only a two-days' march away, and natives exhausted by an excess of

dancing would not be in fit state to repel its ravages should it appear amongst them. The loss of the copra did not trouble him nearly as much as the consequences of the appearance of the epidemic after a prolonged course of furious dancing. Peter Sherwin was a man first and a trader afterwards, and he had seen epidemics in native villages before.

"No make dance," he repeated, using pidgin-English for Bamu's benefit. "Bury them 'Mokohu' boys one time quick. That's all. What they want dance about them boy for? 'Mokohu' boy no belong this place; they not countryman of this village. S'pose some of these people dead, I let them make dance little bit."

Bamu shuffled round the table and to the white man's side. "Too much puri-puri," he said, in a hoarse whisper.

Sherwin looked at him quickly. Sorcery was a power amongst the natives, and he was always running up against its influences.

"What kind puri-puri?" he asked.

The old native hesitated and looked round as though afraid of being heard.

"Them chief say white misi make puri-puri," he whispered, glancing at the sleeping girl. "They say before this misi come no schooner been lost longa surf and nobody drown'. No white misi come here before. This time one come, all crew he drown' and schooner broke al'ogether. Bye-em-bye big sickness come from them other village and all people dead damn quick. Chief say more better make big dance and break that puri-puri."

Sherwin was startled. So this was the reason the natives wanted to hold a big death-wail over the bodies of unrelated natives! They put down the loss of the "Mokohu" and her crew to the presence of machinations of Ellen! They regarded her as a witch and wanted to held a ceremony that might possibly ward off her evil influence! They wanted to guard

against her bringing the disease that was ravaging the villages to the eastward down upon them!

Sherwin's blood boiled and he felt like rushing to the village and bumping some of the superstition-filled heads together. The veins of his forehead stood out hard and he clenched his fists. Then with an effort he collected himself.

"You believe, Taubada?" Bamu questioned.

"Believe, no!" Sherwin hissed. "White misi no can make puri-puri, she big friend belong all native. You tell chief that."

The native started to go, but the white man called him back.

"I believe you are as bad as the rest," he said, accusatively. "You believe white misi make puri-puri?"

"I—I—I no savee," Bamu answered, hesitatingly and doubtingly. "I no savee." He slipped away by the back steps, for Morton and Wilson were coming along the verandah.

"Give us a drink, will you, Sherwin," the Captain said, his voice trembling. "We saw them—and it was something awful." They emptied the glasses Sherwin handed them at a gulp, their hands shaking, a strange pallor on their faces.

"They've got them laid out in front of the village," Wilson said. "We managed to quieten the dancing and uproar, but they are all very sulky and muttering amongst themselves. They didn't like our interfering at all."

Sherwin said nothing of what Bamu had told him, and presently he called Lapa and ordered her to make Miss Russell's bed ready. Lapa obeyed readily enough, but Sherwin's quick eye for native moods detected a strange something in her manner.

"It's all over the village that this girl is a witch," he said to himself, as he and Wilson picked up Ellen's unconscious form and carried her inside. "I'll get hold of the chiefs to-morrow and give them a talking-to," he added grimly.

CHAPTER VII.

WILSON MAKES A MISTAKE

Sherwin did not sleep much that night. He had dragged his stretcher into a position that allowed him a clear view of the doorway of the bedroom, and he had so arranged the lamp that that particular part of the verandah was illuminated as much as possible. His long experience told him that the natives would probably avoid any direct interference, but he was not inclined to leave anything to chance. He tossed restlessly from side to side, and tried to break the monotony by smoking. The beat of drums came faintly through the night air and a village dog howled a despairing note. The coconuts rustled unceasingly in the land-breeze, and the surf crashed its miniature thunder. Somewhere along the beach a lone curlew cried with the wail of a motherless child.

To the white man lying awake on the verandah and thinking of the village full of superstition so close at hand, there was something in these weird sounds of the night that made him very uneasy.

"I'll just have a peep to see she is all right," he said to himself, some time in the early hours of the morning. He rose softly and stepped across the lamplit space and into the bedroom. He discerned Ellen's form beneath the mosquito-net and that of Lapa sleeping on the floor beside her bed. The white girl was awake.

"Anything wrong?" she queried.

"No; it's all right. I thought I heard someone about." He left the room, but just as he reached the doorway in the full glare of the lamplight, Wilson suddenly appeared from out of the darkness round the corner of the verandah. He had a revolver in his hand.

"I heard voices and someone moving about," he

said, stopping a moment and then advancing. "I thought some of the niggers might be prowling about."

"It's all right; it's only me," Sherwin said, going to his stretcher and sitting down. "I was just seeing——" He stopped as he remembered that Wilson knew nothing of the accusations of witchcraft against Ellen, and that it might not be the best policy to tell him. Wilson was a stranger to New Guinea and the ways of natives, and he would not understand the significance of Bamu's communication.

A frown crossed Wilson's face, and he went to the other's side.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I—I thought I heard someone moving, too," Sherwin said, somewhat lamely. "It all right, though: there is no one about."

Wilson looked very hard at him for a moment.

"Oh!" he said deep down in his throat. Then he turned sharply and went away.

Sherwin, wondering what was the matter, filled his pipe for a final smoke before lying down. Wilson had acted very strangely, he thought. He was in the act of applying a match to the tobacco when he realised that the mate might have misunderstood his action. The man had seen him tip-toeing from the door. . . . There was that hesitation and stumbling when he had given his explanation. . . . Sherwin's cheeks flamed hotly, and he clenched his hand with such strength that the stem of his pipe cracked. He jumped up and extinguished the match beneath his bare foot. He would go at once and tell Wilson of the hideous mistake he was making.

He took two strides and then stopped abruptly. No other white knew about the puri-puri business, he reflected, not even the girl herself. They would only become upset and distressed if they knew—especially a stranger in a strange land like Wilson. Besides, Sherwin had resolved to talk the chiefs out of their belief that Ellen was an agent of sorcery, and to do

this he would have to go about the matter in his own way. It would be a delicate business from beginning to end—natives resent affairs of such nature being discussed by people of another race, except the rare white man who, by long acquaintanceship, is in their confidence to a certain extent. The interference of a non-understanding stranger would undoubtedly ruin all. Wilson might be able to keep his mouth shut, but the quick perceptions of the natives would soon tell them that he possessed the knowledge; and Sherwin's task would be vastly more difficult accordingly.

The trader returned to his bed and lay down. He had made up his mind to talk to the chiefs in the morning, and when the sorcery business was blown over he would tell Wilson the reason of his prowling about Ellen's room in the middle of the night. Satisfied that this course was the best, he turned over and soon was fast asleep.

He awoke as the pearl-grey light of dawn was tinging the eastern sky and rapidly swelling into that burst of golden splendor that heralds the coming of the tropic sun. It was a flat calm, for the night wind had gone and the south-east trade had not yet arrived. A number of canoes were pushing off the river beach and heading down-stream to where a certain leaping and splashing near the centre of the bar told of schools of mullet seeking the smooth water of the river. Sherwin went to the verandah railing and, pushing back a portion of the cane blind, looked out across the dark-blue water of the stream to where the roofs of a couple of grass houses peeped from amongst the coconuts of the other bank. A big double-canoe was coming across, the paddlers standing upright, three on each side. Sherwin watched it for a moment; then he let the blind fall back into its place.

"The old puri-puri chief is coming over," he muttered. "They must have sent for him last night."

A light footstep and the rustle of a dress caused him to turn. Ellen was coming from her room, her eyes shining brightly, a penitent smile upon her face.

"I must apologise for fainting like that," she said. "I've never been guilty of such a thing before."

"You slept well?" Sherwin asked.

"Beautifully, thank you. That stuff you gave me was just wonderful. Are the others not up yet? The sleepyheads to be still in bed on such a glorious morning!" She went to the corner of the verandah and looked out across the sea to where the sun's upper limb was showing a rim of golden fire above the edge of the clean-cut horizon. Broad beams of shining bronze radiated upwards, thickening and widening as they rose, and the surface of the sea was giving place to the heavy lauguor of the night a light-streaked awakening. The drooping coconut fronds reflected green and silver, and the grey went out of the beach sand and left it a glittering white. The face of the river lit up as though with a smile, and a hundred patches of color gave its cheeks a bloom and a sparkle to its myriad eyes.

The girl watching from the verandah drew a deep breath.

"It is wonderful! Wonderful! The beginning of a new world!" She uttered the words softly, almost reverently.

"It is not always like this," Sherwin said. "The new day can frown as well as smile, you know. Hulloa, here comes Wilson."

The mate had come around the corner of the verandah and stopped abruptly on seeing the trader and the girl. Without speaking he turned to go back.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilson," Ellen called out, and the mate stopped and faced them again.

"Good morning," he said curtly. Ellen went up to him.

"Are you not well?" she asked, a note of anxiety in her voice.

"I am quite well, thank you."

"I am sure there is something wrong with you," Ellen said. "You are not smiling and you seem unhappy. A morning like this should put anyone in

the best of spirits." She reached up and placed the palm of her hand on his forehead. "You are not getting the New Guinea fever, are you? You don't seem to have a high temperature, but it might be as well to take some quinine. We can't have you getting sick, after all you've been through."

"I assure you I am quite all right, Miss Russell," Wilson said, and, without glancing at Sherwin, walked off.

Ellen watched his retreating figure with a puzzled frown on her face. "He seems quite different this morning," she said, turning to the trader. "I hope I have not offended him in some way."

Sherwin felt very much like going after Wilson and telling him what a fool he was for his absurd suspicions, and the blood mounted hotly to his head. It was intolerable that a girl like Ellen. . . .

"Perhaps he is worrying about his financial position," he said to Ellen. "The loss of the 'Mokohu' hits him very hard, you know."

"The poor boy!" The girl's tone was full of sympathy. "I expect he hasn't a thing left in the world. Could we not help him in some way?" She thought a moment and then looked up and clapped her hands. "I know! When I see my brother I'll ask him to give Mr. Wilson a position on the plantation! My brother will do anything for me, and when I tell him the circumstances there will be no difficulty. That will be great, won't it? It will give him another start in life, and perhaps he will have better luck this time."

She took both of Sherwin's hands in hers and shook them impulsively. At that moment Wilson again appeared round the corner of the verandah, and Ellen dropped Sherwin's hands.

"I'll tell him about it now," she said. "I'm so glad I thought of a way of helping the poor boy!" She ran up to the mate and Sherwin went to the steps and down to the ground.

"It would break her little heart if she knew what

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Wilson was thinking," he muttered. "She thinks such a lot of him, too. It strikes me that Wilson is something of a fool; he ought to think himself a very lucky man to have won the high regard of a girl like that." He walked across the compound to the living-quarters of the natives and called Bamu.

The old native came out, blinking and fastening his lava-lava.

Sherwin shook him roughly. "Here! Wake up! You see that canoe!" He pointed to the river. "You go one time quick and tell Olpo I want yarn longa him. Savee?"

Bamu looked across at the canoe now near the shore. A figure sat hunched in the stern—a figure that was doubled and bent with age.

"You tell him wait for me longa Dubu," Sherwin went on. "I come when breakfast finish. You no frightened to speak to Olpo?"

The very name of the sorcerer was a power all over the district, and it was popularly supposed that the very act of speaking to him was fraught with danger; Olpo was a very crotchety old man and apt to imagine offence where none was intended.

"I little bit frighten'," Bamu answered, "but, no matter, I go."

Sherwin went to the store and took out some pieces of red calico and a few sticks of tobacco.

"Off you go now," he said. "Give these things to Olpo as present from me. Tell him wait for me."

As Bamu went off, Captain Morton approached.

"I think I'll make a start for Moresby to-day," he said, after greetings had been exchanged. "There is nothing to wait here for now; the cargo is safe and we've done all we can for the schooner. There's no use in my wasting any more time. When will it be low water?"

"About ten o'clock."

"I'll start then. That will give me a chance to get over the creek without swimming and chancing the crocodiles."

"I can easily send a canoe along to ferry you——"

"No need to do all that. I will manage all right. I say," he broke off; "I fancy there is something wrong with the love-birds this morning. They are hardly playing speaks."

"You mean——"

"The girl and the mate. She is trying to make herself agreeable to him, but it appears he won't have anything to do with her. I wonder what's the matter? I never thought Wilson would turn sulky like this. They took to one another from the start, and all the way across from Thursday Island it was as good as a play to watch them. But by the look of things there's a bust-up brewing."

"Some trifling disagreement, I suppose," Sherwin said and changed the subject.

For a time they talked of Morton's projected journey, and discussed the probabilities of securing a vessel to come for the cargo.

"I might be lucky enough to catch one of the traders from the other side of Moresby, and if so I won't have much trouble. With decent weather you can look for my return in about five weeks." Morton laughed and patted the other on the back. "And see that the surf is behaving better for my next visit," he added.

"Do you know," Sherwin said slowly. "I think you are one of the gamest men I have ever met. Here you are with your vessel wrecked, your money gone, utterly ruined, yet you are quite cheerful about it. Some men would never get over such a disaster."

Morton laughed again, his face beaming with good nature.

"I thought I would peg out when I woke up in your house the morning afterwards and knew the dear old 'Mokohu' was busted and I was broke. But what was the good of grieving? I asked myself. Everything comes all right some day. And things could have been worse, anyway. What if Miss Russell had been drowned! What could I tell her brother?

Or if young Wilson had gone overside with the crew? I reckon I've a lot to be thankful for."

"But you will have to make a fresh start in life."

"Well, that's nothing. I'll be starting with a clean sheet, anyway. If I haven't got any money, neither do I owe any; and that's a great thing. I'm sorry for Wilson, though; he hasn't my experience to fall back upon."

Sherwin laughed. "That's a new way of looking at things. But, perhaps youthful enthusiasm will compensate him for lack of experience."

"I hope so," Morton said. "Now, there is the cook-boy signalling from the verandah that breakfast is ready."

They made back through the coconuts, and as they reached the steps, the Captain took the trader by the arm.

"While I am away," he said softly, so that those in the house should not hear, "don't let that little girl get miserable. Keep her smiling. I don't like to think of her unhappy. I had a daughter who, if she had lived, would have been about her age and rig by this time."

"All right, Captain, I'll do my best."

"Now, don't forget, Sherwin, I look to you to make her happy."

And again Sherwin promised.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN MORTON DEPARTS

It was very apparent during breakfast that Ellen was distressed and sorely puzzled by Wilson's attitude towards her, and when the meal was over she went straight to her room. Sherwin felt very much like taking the mate to task for his boorish conduct

there and then, but he restrained himself and determined that as soon as he was through with the sorcerer to lose no time in telling him the truth. Incidentally, his liking and regard for the man were beginning to suffer; it struck him that one so unreasonably suspicious and jealous could not possess as much goodness as he had credited him with. Sherwin considered that a nature that could be so untrustful of a girl like Ellen must be kinked or tainted.

Captain Morton had packed his gear and rations the night before, so that when four natives whom Sherwin had ordered as carriers appeared, there was nothing to delay his start.

"These men will carry your things to the creek," the trader said, "and the people in the village just on the other side will carry you to the next village, and so on. The rate of payment for a day's carrying is one stick of tobacco per man."

"About a penny a day!" exclaimed Ellen, approaching the group at the foot of the steps. She had come from her room at the sounds of the Captain's preparations for departure. "Evidently there are no wages boards in these parts! Have you got my letter, Captain? You might be lucky enough to catch my brother in Moresby and then you can give it to him himself. He has a boat, you know, and goes to Moresby for his provisions and things."

"I'll give him your love with it, and tell him how bright and well and handsome you were looking when I left. It's up to you, Sherwin——" Morton glanced at the mate "to see she keeps like that. Now, the tide is about right and I must be off. Come on boys, pick up your loads now."

The natives shouldered the bundles containing preserved foods, spare clothing, sleeping-gear and trade tobacco for the payment of carriers. The billycans and frying pans they carried in their hands. As they filed through the coconuts to the gate of the compound, Morton held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said cheerfully. "Expect me in about five weeks."

Sherwin took his hand and shook it heartily.

"Remember, easy stages will do the trick," he said. "Rushing things is no good. Good-bye."

Morton turned to Wilson. "Keep your pecker up, son," he said. "If we're broke, we're still alive and healthy—and that's a great lot. Keep an eye on the cargo, for I can't expect Sherwin to neglect his business for the sake of keeping a look-out for thieving niggers."

Wilson muttered some commonplace reply, and Ellen stepped forward and grasped the Captain's arm.

"Be very careful of yourself, won't you?" she said in a sweetly anxious voice. "I will be thinking of you tramping those interminable beaches and wondering how you are getting on."

Morton's eyes suddenly dimmed, and his voice was a trifle husky as he answered:—

"I had a daughter like you once—but she died. She was loving and sweet just like you. You remind me very much of her." He pulled himself together. "Look out you don't get the fever; I don't want to see your fresh skin turn yellow and dried-up. And keep those pretty eyes bright and smiling for my return."

Ellen looked up at him, her face softly aglow.

"I will! Good-bye. There!" she said, reaching up and kissing his cheek. Morton smiled broadly at the two men. "I am having a bit of good luck after all," he said. Then he released the girl and strode after the carriers who were now on the beach and marching in single file.

At the gate he turned and waved to the watchers at the house, then he swung sharply to the beach and was soon lost to view.

"Isn't he a good old chap?" Ellen said as the three went up the steps. "I almost wish I was his daughter. What a cheerful outlook he has on life! He is abso-

lutely ruined, and yet there is nothing in his manner to suggest he is not the most prosperous of men." Sherwin could not help glancing at Wilson as the girl spoke, and he saw that she had done the same. The mate's face wore a distinctly sullen expression, and when he reached the verandah he went straight to one of the canvas chairs at the far end and picked up a book.

"He does not seem in the mood for conversation this morning," Ellen whispered. "Do you think I have offended him in some way?" she asked anxiously. "He was never like this before."

"He will be all right presently," the trader said. "Now, I must leave you for awhile; I have to go to the village on some business."

"Oh, let me come!" she said eagerly.

"Not this morning." Sherwin's tone was gentle but firm. "You stay here and read. I won't be long."

"But do let me go with you. I won't be in the way; I'll not do or say anything, and I'll keep as quiet as a mouse."

But Sherwin would not hear of it. He could not tell her what his business at the village was, and he was hard put to it to make excuses for her not coming. And his task was made none the easier when she gave what he suspected was her real reason for wanting to go. "I don't want to stay here by myself while Mr. Wilson is grumpy like this. I can see him glowering over the top of his book at me now."

"You go into your room and stay there till I come back," he said. "I really can't take you to the village this morning; there are things not fit for a woman. . . . You understand?"

"You make me all the more curious," she laughed. "But I will show myself good and obedient for once. I will see what there is in the kitchen that will make up into a decent lunch. How will that do?"

"Splendidly! I will hurry back." And with that he went down the steps. "The poor girl evidently

thinks the world of him; it's a damned shame that he should treat her so. I'll fix him up when I get back," he said to himself as he went along the beach. "Some men don't know when they are well off."

He turned into the village and strode along the street past the gaping women on the porches of the houses, and groups of young men armed with spears, who had just returned from the early morning hunt. One or two spoke to him and three or four youngsters came forward with requests for lollies, but everyone knew he was on a mission of importance and that the puri-puri chief was awaiting him in the Dubu. Sherwin recognised there was a strange something in the air, and a curious furtiveness was expressed in the manner of the older men. At any other time, the trader would have been surrounded by chattering villagers—the old men giving him the news and, incidentally, cadging tobacco; the others telling him of the growth of the yams and taro in the gardens, and asking if he wanted to buy any fish. But to-day he walked alone; and, somehow, the attitude of the natives depressed him.

He was rather pleased than otherwise when Bamu appeared near the front of the Dubu. The old native had been lying in wait for his appearance. "I tell Olpo," he said, in answer to Sherwin's unspoken query. "He stop inside now."

"You come with me," the white man ordered. "Olpo no savee English and I want you to talk."

"I—no like, Taubada; I too much fright."

But Sherwin was in no mood to stand any nonsense; he just took Bamu by the hair and propelled him to the ladder leading to the porch of the Dubu. This porch was twelve or fifteen feet above the ground, and was more or less shaded by a portion of the arched roof projecting for three or four feet. The broken bowsprit of the "Mokohu" had struck the roof a glancing blow, but with sufficient force to dislodge some of the rafters, and leave their ends pro-

truding, and a portion of the thatch was draped about the jibboom like a ragged garment.

"Olpo too much wild because schooner broke roof belong Dubu," Bamu panted as he and the white man finished climbing the rickety ladder, and reached the porch. "He wild like hell! He say white misi no good!"

From the elevation Sherwin was able to look down upon the "Mokohu" for the full length of her deck. The vessel was quite dry, for the tide was well out, and she sat perfectly upright in the sand that had been heaped on either side by the action of the sea. Her splintered deck, the absence of bulwarks, the stump of mainmast, gave her an almost pathetic appearance—the appearance of a brave fighter who has done his best and splendidly failed to a superior opponent.

"Poor old 'Mokohu,'" Sherwin said, as he turned to the narrow opening that served as the doorway of the Dubu, "you are there for keeps."

He dragged Bamu in after him, and then stood still till his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. The Dubu was without windows and the only light that entered came through the doorway, and various narrow slits in the wall that looked more accidental than otherwise. The interior smelt abominably—the smell of black bodies, over-ripe fruit, rank tobacco and that sickening odor caused by lack of ventilation. But Sherwin was accustomed to that sort of thing, and he stood patiently waiting, his eyes fixed on a mass of glowing coals at the far end. Bamu stood behind him, occasionally muttering strange words in a tone which the white man recognised as that of fear. No one approached them, and there was absolute silence. But Sherwin knew that a number of natives were close at hand, and that they were waiting for him to move or speak.

Presently the gloom began to lighten, and the various parts of the Dubu became roughly outlined. As the influence of the bright sunlight died in the

white man's eyes he saw that each side of the building was lined with tiny cubicles, a passage or corridor running down the centre to the far end. Attached to the fronts of the cubicles were grotesquely-painted and be-feathered dancing masks and shields, some of them as much as ten feet long, with a centre design in colored earths intended to represent a human face. Beside them were bundles of man-killing arrows, and seven-foot bows of fire-toughened wood. Near the door were several wooden drums, four feet long, by about eighteen inches thick at the ends, carved and painted, and narrow-waisted in the manner of an hour-glass. In the first cubicle and in the one opposite were a pair of carved figures fastened to a kind of seat. In front of each figure was a human skull on a stick fastened to the floor.

Sherwin had seen these sorts of things many times before, and he was quite unimpressed by what would have caused a stranger to shudder. Quite calmly and deliberately, he entered the first cubicle and took one of the skulls from off its stick. It was a very old specimen and several of its teeth had been knocked out or smashed by the death-blow. The gaps had been filled with artificial teeth of gum and its nose was constructed of the same material. Sherwin, with the gruesome object in his hand, walked down the centre passage to where the fire glowed and partially illuminated its immediate surroundings. He glanced in each cubicle as he passed, and saw that several were occupied by natives squatting on their haunches and sucking at immense bamboo pipes.

"Olpo!" he called as he reached the fire. "Where are you?"

There was no immediate answer, but presently there was a shuffling of bare feet on the half-round surface of the flooring slabs, and a very wizened, very small, entirely nude man appeared.

"Come here, Bamu!" Sherwin ordered, and that worthy sidled up in a half-hearted fashion.

"Tell Olpo I have come to ask him what for he

talk puri-puri," Sherwin said, fingering the skull. As Bamu began the translation, the trader seated himself on the floor and looked at this sorcerer whose fame and influence reached from the Purari Delta to the hills beyond Kerema. Sherwin had seen him once or twice before, but not at such close quarters as this; Olpo lived with his three wives in a house across the river, and rarely did he travel about. The villagers supplied him with food, and saw to it that he was left in undisturbed peace. The Government had tried many times to catch this man whose influence was the cause of much tribal warfare and trouble between villages, but the natives of his own village always managed to smuggle him away. Not that they liked or loved the old sorcerer; they lived in fear of his threatening them with disaster and sudden death if his demands were not complied with. Many a native would cheerfully have given him up and so removed a menace from the community. But it was the fear of what Olpo would do them in the way of revenge when he returned after a period of imprisonment in the white man's gaol that deterred them. Even if he did not return, or the Government sent him to another part of the country, they considered distance would not prevent him avenging himself. For what is distance to an all-powerful sorcerer? The fact that he lived many days' journey away would not hinder the effects of his machinations.

Sherwin saw that Olpo's hair was plastered with white clay on both sides of his head, and twisted into a series of tapering points in the centre. His face was streaked with red ochre, irregularly, haphazardly to all appearances, and there were white circles about his eyes. Suspended from his neck was a dagger of cassowary-bone, a venomous-looking thing, single edged and bound about the haft with native twine. On his arms were smoke-blackened bands of woven grass, and his wrists were encircled by bracelets of tiny shells and dog's-teeth. His ribs were picked out in white, and his breast-bone was outlined in red.

As he turned his face side on to the white man to listen to Bamu's words, Sherwin saw that the space between his nostrils had been pierced and distended till it formed a hoop that hung below the line of his mouth. As he sat facing the fire the light lit up every detail of his wizened face, and revealed an expression of deep cunning in his eyes.

"I don't wonder they are all frightened of you, you ugly old brute," Sherwin thought, as Bamu finished speaking. "You would give anybody the creeps. Now, here comes the rest of the gang."

A number of men were coming from the cubicles, and as they reached the fire they squatted in a circle of which Olpo was in the centre. They were all old men, chiefs of various kinds. One of them was the man who greeted the trader with the word "Tomorrow!" Sherwin nodded to them and one or two replied with a grunt, but the others seated themselves in perfect silence and stared straight at the small, decorated figure in the centre.

Presently Olpo began to speak. His voice was husky with age, and he dwelt on the guttural sounds in a way that was particularly displeasing to the European ear. Sherwin tried to catch a word or two that he could recognise, but failed. The other men neither moved nor spoke when the sorcerer finished, and in a stillness that seemed strangely tense and full of expectancy, Bamu began his translation of Olpo's words:—

"He say white misi make too much trouble al'gether. Ship broke, crew dead, bye-em-bye plenty sickness come and al'ogether people dead. This thing no happen before. When white misi come, plenty no-good thing happen. Must be white misi make puri-puri." He stopped and the squatted circle grunted approvingly.

"I know all about that," Sherwin said impatiently. "Go on!"

"Olpo say more better he make one big puri-

puri, one big, strong puri-puri to make white misi go 'way."

The white man laughed out loud—a laugh that seemed strangely foreign to that atmosphere of gloom and superstition and gruesome relics. "Do you think your miserable puri-puri will make her go away?" he asked.

There was no response, the natives sat like graven images, their eyes centred on the fire. Sherwin stood up, the skull still in his hand.

"Your puri-puri no can make people do things," he said derisively. "Puri-puri no can hurt white people." He lifted the skull high above his head and made as though to throw it to the floor. The men looked at him, alarm showing in their faces. The skull was a valuable treasure, as Sherwin knew by the care that had been used in its preservation, and its destruction would be a serious loss. From his knowledge of native customs, and from the fact that he had found it in a place of honor near the doorway, Sherwin guessed it might be the skull of a great chief or sorcerer and, as such, particularly valuable.

"Tell that ugly old fiend to use his puri-puri in stopping me from smashing this thing," he said, and Bamu, grasping the import of his words, uttered a few hurried sentences to Olpo. One or two of the others sprang up and reached for some bamboo head-knives hanging on the wall near by, but Sherwin pushed them aside. He stood up, and for a full minute watched the sorcerer, the skull still high above his head. Then, with all his might, he threw the thing to the floor where the brittle bones, frail and half-rotten with age, smashed to a hundred bits. The natives gasped and jumped towards him, but Sherwin had been too long amongst natives not to know how to handle them. A couple of well-directed blows on the stomachs of the first pair doubled-up the recipients and deterred the rest.

Olpo never moved; he sat as still and composedly as though nothing out of the way had happened.

"He lifted the skull high above his head and made as though to throw it on the floor." (p. 79

"Ask him what will happen if white misi no go away?" Sherwin commanded. Bamu looked from the face of his master to that of the sorcerer, and did as he was bidden.

Olpo uttered a single sentence in reply—and uttered it in a tone so colorless that the threat in it was glaringly obvious.

"He say might be white misi dead one-time quick."

A sudden fear gripped Sherwin's heart. He knew that a sorcerer with a reputation to maintain would not hesitate to have the food of his victim poisoned or one of certain species of snake that was particularly venemous hidden in a bed. In a case like this, a threat from a man like Olpo was something more than mere words, and Sherwin knew that serious trouble would ensue if he did not take immediate steps to stop it.

He sprang at the sorcerer and wound his fingers about his wrinkled throat.

"I'll put a stop to your scheming!" he roared, throwing the man to the floor. The others were taken by surprise, and for a second they hesitated as to what to do. Olpo was gasping and striving to tear away the powerful fingers that were choking his life out.

"That will do you," said Sherwin, rising just as the other men were about to rush. "I don't want to kill you; as a matter of fact I don't want to have anything to do with you at all. But, by God, if you get up to any more of your tricks, I'll wring your scraggy neck all same bird!" He looked at the sorcerer groaning on the floor and turned rapidly.

"Get out of my way!" He pushed the men aside and strode up the passage. He was half-way along when the opening of the doorway darkened suddenly and a voice cried:—

"Mr. Sherwin! Mr. Sherwin!" and Ellen's form squeezed through.

The trader ran to her side at once. "What is the matter? You must not come in here. No women are

allowed to enter this place. Outside, quickly!'' Without giving her a chance to remonstrate, he pushed her back through the doorway, and then helped her from the porch to the ground.

When they stood on the beach beside the ''Mokohu'' the man saw that the girl's eyes were blazing and her cheeks flushed right up.

''Mr. Wilson!'' she exclaimed, panting. ''He is a horrible man! I asked him if he were angry with me and he flew into a temper and said——'' She hid her face in her hands, and burst into a fit of weeping. Sherwin slipped his arm around her, and drew her down on to the sand. ''Don't take any notice of it,'' he said, endeavoring to soothe her by stroking her hair and patting her shoulders.

She buried her face in her hands again, her body shaking convulsively with sobs. A number of natives crowded round, whispering excitedly amongst themselves. From a word or two that he could not help recognising, Sherwin realised that the news of Olpo's threat to put a stop to Ellen's witchery had got about the village already, and these onlookers regarded the girl's evident distress as a manifestation of the sorcerer's influence. ''See how quickly Olpo punished his enemies,'' they said. . . .

Sherwin drove them off at last, and as Ellen was now more composed, he helped her up and took her along the beach to the station. Ellen did not speak, and Sherwin, not wishing to intrude upon her thoughts, refrained from addressing her. He kept his arm around her, for the girl was shaken and in need of support. He helped her as he would have helped a sick mate, and was glad he could be of some assistance. But as they reached the gate of the compound, a feeling that he would give anything to kiss this girl who leaned on him swept over him like a tidal wave. He flushed and trembled as though with ague, and the veins of his forehead stood out hard. Ellen sensed there was something wrong with him,

for suddenly she disengaged his arm and asked as they entered the gate of the compound:—

"Are you cold? You are shivering."

"N-o!" Sherwin stammered, clenching his fists in an effort to regain his self control.

CHAPTER IX.

WILSON SHIFTS CAMP

On reaching the house, Ellen went straight to her room. There was no sign of Wilson, but the cook-boy informed Sherwin that soon after Ellen had run out of the house to the village, the mate had gone off along the river bank.

"He come 'nother kind, that feller," the boy added. "Too much wild al'ogether. When I ask him if he want morning tea, he tell me go hell one-time quick. I no savee what's matter he wild longa me."

Sherwin assured the boy that he was in no way the cause of Wilson's anger, and then he sent him with a cup of tea to Ellen. He drank off a stiff nip of brandy, for the experience in the Dubu had shaken him more than he had suspected at the time, and then he left the house and went in search of Wilson.

The mate was behaving very ridiculously, he thought, as he turned on to the river beach. He wondered how anyone could be so untrustful of a girl like Ellen. And, anyway, even if his absurd conclusions were correct, he had no right to insult the girl in that fashion. Sherwin's blood boiled as he thought of Ellen's distress. His fingers itched for a grip of Wilson's throat, and he was glad that he would have an opportunity of meeting him away from the girl's presence.

Then he remembered that his first duty was to keep cool, and with an effort that was distinctly physical

he forced back his anger. The thought that the girl had flown to him in her trouble and that weeping on his shoulder had comforted her to a certain extent, helped him to regain his self-control. And a cool head was needed more than anything just then. For, beside the business with Wilson, there was a village-full of natives whose attitude towards himself and Ellen was distinctly hostile. Olpo and the other chiefs would lose no time in endeavoring to make trouble, and Sherwin was the only one who had any chance of handling them. At any time there might be occasion for that quick thinking and rapidity of decision that so often makes one man a power against a multitude. Sherwin had more than once been in tight places when the question of life or death had quivered like a needle between the poles of an electro-magnet, and such experiences had taught him the value of calmness and deliberation in the face of an excited, hostile mob.

He found Wilson sitting on a beached canoe about three hundred yards from the house. The man looked up at his approach and jumped to his feet.

"Good morning," the trader said coolly. "I've been looking for you."

"What the devil do you want?" Wilson snapped, his face scowling.

"Merely to ask you what you meant by speaking to Miss Russell as you did awhile ago. You have distressed her very much."

The line of Wilson's lips loosened and his eyebrows went up in a sneer.

"She knew where to go for consolation, then," he said, nastily. "Could you not soothe her?"

Sherwin's fists closed involuntarily, but he answered calmly:—

"I am afraid such an honor is not for me. Now, I would like to explain that you are making a hideous mistake. I could not tell you about it before, for there were other things to be done first. But it does not matter now."

"No, I suppose it does not. You keep her; I don't want her. I'm not going to put foot inside your house again. I'll send a nigger for my things." He turned and started to walk away. Sherwin reached out and grasped his shoulder.

"Don't be a fool!" he said, keeping his tone level with an effort. "You don't understand. Just listen till I tell you——"

"Damn you!" Wilson shouted, tearing himself free. "Keep your explanations and the girl too. I don't want to have anything to do with either of you. There she is coming for you now." He pointed back along the beach, and Sherwin, turning, saw Ellen approaching.

Wilson swung on his heel and took a couple of strides in the direction of the village. Then he looked back over his shoulder and said angrily:—

"You can't hoodwink a man who has lived in a city as I have; I've seen too much."

Sherwin watched his figure go up the beach and turn in amongst the coconuts of the village. Then he felt for his pipe and matches, saying to himself:—

"Personally, I think that if his ideas of women are representative of those of city people, I'm glad I live in the wilds. Also, if Ellen had not appeared at the moment she did, nothing would have prevented me from giving him a thrashing."

He walked back slowly and met the approaching girl.

"I—I saw you go and came after you," she said. "I guessed you were looking for Mr. Wilson, and I wanted to prevent you and he coming to blows."

"You did," Sherwin said with a little laugh. "You appeared just at the right moment. Now, don't think about him any more, and let us get back to the house."

"I thought he was such a nice boy on the 'Mokohu,'" Ellen said, as they neared the station. "We were great friends. He looked after my comfort and was very good in every way. He and I spent

a great deal of time in one another's company, and Captain Morton took a delight in teasing me about it. I am dreadfully disappointed in him. I don't know how he can be so foolish as to go on the way he is going."

"Don't think any more about it," Sherwin repeated. "When he finds out his mistake he will apologise readily enough."

Ellen drew herself up and looked straight at him.

"I never want to speak to or see him again," she said, with more than a touch of bitterness. "I hate him!"

"He won't annoy you any more," the trader assured her. "He is not going to live in the house again. He will probably make the wrecked schooner his home till Captain Morton returns."

"I'm glad of that," she said simply. "It would be unendurable to have to meet him every hour of the day.

A pair of double canoes were drawn up to the bank beside the station, and a dozen men and women were unloading coconuts and carrying them into the compound. Sherwin stopped to watch them for a moment, then he addressed a man whose bearing seemed to indicate he was some sort of chief or leader:—

"You come from Lahari?"

The man nodded, staring at Ellen, wonder at her appearance showing in his eyes. "Yes, Taubada. We bring coconuts for you, because we hear you got plenty tobacco and calico now."

"He is from one of the up-river villages," Sherwin said to Ellen. "Lahari supplies me with a lot of coconuts." He turned to the native:—"You been longa my village?"

"No; we come longa station one-time."

"You no hear about puri-puri?"

The man's face assumed a startled expression, and the others near by dropped their coconuts and crowded up.

"What puri-puri? We no hear-im."

"Oh, nothing," Sherwin said, and put them off with questions about the quantity of coconuts they had.

As he and Ellen turned away, the girl asked:—

"What is puri-puri? It seems to be something the natives dread."

"Superstition, witchcraft, sorcery. It is a very powerful factor in their lives." He thought it as well to give her a hint that all was not right in the village. "The natives here have got some very silly notions into their heads lately, and I wanted to find out if the up-river people had been affected. If you should see any of my people somewhat strange in their manner, you will know what is the matter."

"But I don't know what is the matter," Ellen objected with a smile. "You haven't told me what the trouble is."

Sherwin debated in his mind as to the advisability of putting her in full possession of the facts. Would it do any good if she knew the natives accused her of being a witch and were ready to blame any and every mishap to her influence? he asked himself. He decided that the situation would not be improved by her possessing such knowledge, and that she would only be the more worried and upset.

"It's not worth bothering about," he answered. "You would not credit the foolishness of some of the notions natives get into their heads at times. Now, would you like to see copra in the process of manufacture?"

"I would very much indeed," she replied, and Sherwin, congratulating himself that he had successfully diverted the conversation from the subject of puri-puri, took her to the drying-house, where a number of natives were engaged in splitting coconuts.

The drying-house was a long, narrow building, low-roofed and with numerous trays projecting upon runners from the sides. Each of these trays was a few inches deep and about six feet long by two wide, with

a bottom of split bamboo. The building faced the east, so that the trays on both sides received the maximum amount of sunlight. The natives were splitting the coconuts by means of small axes or tomahawks. Some were very expert, a single blow resulting in the nut being split in two equal-sized pieces.

"Do you know," Ellen said, "before I saw them growing, I thought the complete coconuts were the round, hairy things we used to buy in the shops. I had no idea that they were merely the kernels, and that in their natural state there was a thick husk around them."

"A lot of people 'down South' have that impression, I am afraid," Sherwin laughed.

Together they watched the split nuts being placed on the ground with the white flesh upright. The water, or "milk" ran away in a little gutter, or was soaked up by the porus sand.

"We leave them like that for a day or so, and then, when the action of the sun-heat has loosened the 'flesh' sufficiently to allow of its easy extraction, it is taken out, cut into small pieces, and placed upon the trays for drying. At night the trays have to be pushed into the house, or the dew would make the finished article all specked. In some places, especially where there is such a lot of heavy weather as to make sun-drying almost impossible, artificial heat is used. Such copra does not bring as high a price as the sun-dried, and there is a lot of work in making and attending to the kilns. This place is lucky enough to have plenty of sunlight."

"It is very interesting," Ellen said. "But I must have a look at the stove in the kitchen. I was making up a nice luncheon when I ran after you to the village. So, if you will excuse me, I'll see how it is getting on."

"I am inclined to think that the lunch is of greater interest than the manufacture of copra," Sherwin laughed, as the girl left him and went to

the house. "It's many a year since I had a real white lady to cook for me."

The Lahari men soon finished carrying their coconuts to the station, and Sherwin took them to the storehouse and paid them. It was a long job, for some of the men wanted tobacco and jew's harps, while others asked for sheath-knives, glass beads, leather belts with imitation-silver buckles, and fishing lines. The women had no voice in the matter, although, as Sherwin well knew, they had done most of the collecting of the coconuts. They hovered at the doorway, content in the knowledge that their husbands would present them with a small portion of the "trade" later on. Most of the sets of items asked for were in excess of the value of the respective lots of coconuts, and there was much bargaining and wrangling before the final deal was completed.

But Sherwin got them out at last and shut the door.

"There won't be much trading as soon as the villages get to hear about the puri-puri," he said to himself. "I wonder how long they will be able to keep away? Every village for fifty miles around is short of tobacco, and that's a thing they can't stand for long. Olpo will have to show his power very soon, or lack of tobacco and other things will drive the people to trading as usual." He glanced at the nut-splitters. "My own boys will probably stick to me, mainly because there are several months' wages due to them which they would be afraid of losing if they deserted."

Ellen called from the verandah that luncheon was ready, and Sherwin went to the house, his eyes fixed on the slight figure in white awaiting him at the top of the steps.

"Her safety is in my hands," he muttered. "It's up to me to keep very careful guard over the little lady."

CHAPTER X.

SHERWIN KEEPS WATCH

All through the afternoon natives came and went about the station, and although Sherwin watched them very carefully, he failed to detect anything suggestive of coming trouble. Several canoe-loads of coconuts and semi-dried copra arrived from up-river villages, and supplies of fish and native vegetables came to hand as usual. Sherwin was well aware that the news of his defiance of Olpo by smashing a treasured skull and the accusations against Ellen were rapidly permeating throughout the district. In a day or two not a village for half a hundred miles around would be in ignorance of the happenings at Wallala, for, as in most black countries, there is a system of bush telegraphing that approaches the marvellous. From then on every native in the district would be on the *qui vive* to hear of Olpo manifesting his power, of him showing his might in such a way as would leave no manner of doubt as to the infallibility of the punishment that would befall those who dared to defy the great sorcerer.

Sherwin came to the conclusion that Olpo had not put a tabu on trading, that the natives were to go about their business as usual, and not attempt any interference with the whites for the time being at any rate. This was evidently an illustration of the cunning that had given Olpo his powerful position; he knew that if the trading were stopped the consequent tobacco shortage would make the people very restless. Olpo had probably instructed the Wallala people to leave everything to him and the other chiefs.

About four o'clock a native came from the village for Wilson's belongings, and Sherwin wrapped them up in a blanket and gave them to him.

"That white man stop longa schooner." The native volunteered the information. "He been clean

out cabin. I think you two feller row," he added with a leer. "You been chuck him out?"

"Never mind about that. That white man got tucker?"

"Plen'y. He find-em tin meat and biscuits longa one locker. I think you feller been forget them thing."

"Wilson has found a store of foodstuffs we must have overlooked," Sherwin said to Ellen, when the native had gone. "I was wondering what he was going to do for food."

"So he will not need to send or come here for supplies," Ellen said. "I'm glad. I never want to see him again."

"Are you not a bit hard on him?" Sherwin asked. "He is making a mistake, and a horrible one at that, but, at the same time, he is showing how much he thought of you."

"And how little now!" Ellen's tone was almost vicious. "The fact that he can think of me as he does steels me against him. I am driven to the conclusion that he has an evil mind which influences his judgment of others. A man like that is anathema to me!"

They had supper at the table on the verandah, and Sherwin gazed his fill at the beauty and grace of the girl who sat opposite him and poured out the tea. It was a full half-hour before dark, for the trader preferred having the evening meal before the hordes of mosquitoes arrived, and the last rays of the sinking sun pierced the interstices of the blinds and lit up the girl's face and head so that the bronze in her hair shone like new gold. She was wearing a blouse of some light material that left uninterrupted the sloping outline of her shoulders and the swell of her breast. The man noticed for the first time that her arms were exquisitely moulded, and her wrists and hands full of a delicate strength. Framed in golden sunlight against the grey-brown thatch of the wall, she seemed a very wonderful crea-

ture to the man who, for ten years, had seen no feminine thing more handsome than coarse-featured native girls. But while he intensely admired her mere animal beauty, it was before the goodness that seemed to radiate from her that he bowed in reverence. He did not attempt to conceal from himself that a decade of exile from his fellows might render him a poor judge of female beauty, and that any white-skinned woman might seem the acme of loveliness by comparison with the copper complexioned natives he saw every day. But he believed that a life in the open, close contact with nature and real things, kept the mind healthy and clean, and enabled one to recognise purity of soul. It was one of his tenets that purity and sincerity recognised those qualities in another. Peter Sherwin's life had been a straight one in every sense, and Ellen's clean-mindedness made to him a powerful appeal.

He smoked a pipe on the verandah after supper and for awhile he and the girl talked of various topics connected with life in New Guinea. He told her of the cannibal tribes in the regions of the Upper-Purari, of the difficulties of trading with certain villages that always demanded more than a fair price for their products, and he spoke of the sago-makers in the swamps and the women who carried enormous loads upon their heads.

"What a colorful life!" Ellen exclaimed. "How different to the hum-drum of the cities of civilisation! I can't understand how so many men—strong, young men—are content to fritter their lives away at monotonous office tasks in a crowded city when there is a life like this to be had for the taking. I know which I would prefer if I were a man."

"But it's not always as pleasant as you seem to think," Sherwin said. "There is another side besides the rosy. Think of the fever and lack of proper white-man food. Then there is plenty of the sordid and horrible. An epidemic, for instance. I've seen sights in stricken villages that kept me awake for

weeks, and even now I see them in my dreams at times. When the dysentery ravaged the villages east of Cape Possession—but there," he broke off, "I won't distress you." He rose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the railing. "I told Bamu to fix up my bunk under the house," he said. "I'll go and see if he has done it."

"But why are you shifting from your usual place on the verandah?" Ellen asked.

"Well—I thought it was—er—hardly the thing to——" He stuttered and paused. "It will be cooler there, and as the house is seven feet off the ground, there is plenty of room," he said hurriedly.

"Now please don't be silly and absurdly conventional. There is no reason why you should put yourself out because of me."

"But people will talk——"

"Let them!" Her tone was very scornful. "I did not think you would be so sensitive of other people's opinions."

"I was thinking of you."

"In that case, you will occupy your usual place." She smiled and took his hand. "It is very nice of you to be so thoughtful, and I fully appreciate it, but I would not be happy if I thought you were inconveniencing yourself on my behalf."

But Sherwin was determined. "No, Miss Russell," he said firmly. "It won't do. I'm not going to have every low-down white and beachcomber from Moresby to Samarai talking about you. And, besides, now that Wilson is away, the business of looking after the cargo devolves on me. Some of the natives might take it into their heads to try a bit of pilfering any night, and from under the house there is an uninterrupted view." He held out his hand. "Goodnight."

Then, before she could make any further protest, he went along the verandah and down the steps.

Sherwin had another object in sleeping under the house. That portion of the "Mokohu's" cargo which

could not be stacked in the storeroom had been filed in two rows under the living house. A clear space ran down the centre from end to end and left an unobstructed view of both the front and back steps. Sherwin had had his bunk placed in the centre of this space in such a position that a man lying on it could see either steps by merely turning his head. From the verandah above there was no such command of the approaches to the house, and Sherwin had resolved that if Olpo the sorcerer attempted to get into the house at night he would make the most of every opportunity of seeing him.

"I wonder if it would be as well if I told her about the puri-puri business and put her on her guard?" he asked himself as he lay down and drew the mosquito curtain. "I know she is not lacking in courage, and that she has plenty of spirit. But a thing like this might unnerve her." He lay thinking it over for awhile, and then decided not to tell her for a day or two at least; perhaps by that time the whole business would have blown over. Indeed. it might well be, he thought, that Olpo was disinclined to try his tricks upon Europeans for fear of the loss of prestige failure would bring upon him. In that case, Sherwin would only be alarming the girl for nothing. He resolved to lie awake each night, and keep careful watch of the steps, making up in the daytime for the loss of sleep. Up till the time the moon rose it would be fairly dark, but the light of the stars was sufficient to give him a clear view round the house and its approaches.

But nothing happened that night. Up till midnight, or thereabouts, there was the sound of a pair of softly-beaten tom-toms in the village and a subdued chorus of chanting natives. No one came near the house, and soon after the first of the daylight flushed the sky, the watcher fell into a sound sleep.

He was awakened about ten o'clock by Ellen. The girl was standing at his side with a cup of coffee and some biscuits.

"How soundly you sleep!" she exclaimed. "I thought you would never wake. It is long past breakfast time, but when Bamu told me you had not yet risen, I thought you might not like to be disturbed. So, I let you sleep on. You are not ill, are you?"

Sherwin rose and stretched himself and rubbed his eyes, which he felt were a tell-tale red.

"I believe you have been awake all night," Ellen said, looking at him sharply. "Could you not sleep?"

"Not very well. Ten o'clock!" Sherwin said, glancing at the position of the sun. "I never slept in so long in my life."

"I knew you would not be comfortable down here," Ellen said. "But you would not listen to me. Now, come and have your breakfast."

"Nothing happened to disturb you in the night?" he asked, as he sat down at the table on the verandah.

"Nothing. Why do you ask? Lapa and another woman slept on the floor beside me, and they never moved till it was time to get up."

Sherwin changed the subject then, and when he finished his belated breakfast, he left the house and went to where a number of natives with strings of coconuts were awaiting him.

Several parties of men and women came from the village during the morning and traded coconuts and copra for tobacco and calico. They behaved in their usual manner and one of them informed him that Wilson had fixed up the cabin of the "Mokohu" into a living house, and had purchased some bananas and other fruit from the villagers. They gave the trader the usual village tittle-tattle—one of the young men had speared an extra large rock cod; an old coconut tree belonging to Barr, the canoe-maker, had fallen from old age; did the Taubada know that the Laharis were going to have a big feast next time the moon was full? Bamu's cousin, who was married to a Kerema woman was sick and his little son was hot as though with a fever.

"What's the matter with Bamu's cousin?" Sherwin asked.

"We feller no savee. Sometimes he hot; sometimes he cold. He get 'nother kind sickness."

When they had gone, Sherwin went back to the house.

"It might be a case of malaria—natives do get it sometimes—or just a common cold," he said to Ellen. "But I will go to the village and see. I'm that jumpy about the epidemic that I would not be able to rest till——"

"I'll come, too," Ellen said at once. "Just wait till I get my hat. I don't like to think of those poor people being sick when perhaps I can help them." She ran into her room and reappeared a moment later with her Panama.

Sherwin told himself he was a fool for having mentioned anything about going to the village, and he cast about in his mind for an excuse for leaving her behind. Knowing what he knew, he deemed it highly inadvisable for her to go near the village.

"Don't you bother," he said, lamely. "I'll run along and come back immediately. There is probably nothing much the matter."

Ellen laughed. "Your mind has become easier about it being the epidemic all of a sudden. Now, come on. You left me behind once before when I wanted to go, but I am determined this time." She went to the steps, and Sherwin, seeing that it was no use protesting further, followed obediently.

Bamu caught up to them when they were midway to the village. He had run all the way from the station, and he panted for breath as the man and the girl stopped and looked at him.

"You go look cousin belong me?" he asked, addressing Sherwin, but looking at Ellen out of the corner of his eye.

"Yes," the trader answered. "I hear he sick feller."

Bamu shook his head vigorously. "No more! He all right. He no sick little bit. More better leave him."

"But I heard from some of the people he is sick, and son belong him, too."

"They gammon. Them two feller all right, number one."

"He seems very anxious to convince us that there is no need for us seeing his cousin," Ellen remarked, her tone showing she suspected Bamu of a hidden motive. "But, since we are so near, we might as well go on."

"More better leave him," Bamu said, as the pair started again. "No good you look him." There was a hint of threat in his voice, and Sherwin turned on him savagely:—

"Get back to your work! Hurry! I don't want an old coot like you telling me what to do, or not to do!" He took a stride in the other's direction, and Bamu hung his head and turned back for the station. But, after he had gone fifty yards, or so, the white man saw him go to the very edge of the water, stop, and make a number of signals with his hands. Some men were spearing fish in the shallows of the backwash in front of the village, and one of them waved in reply and at once went to the houses.

Sherwin was relieved to see that Ellen had not noticed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMING OF THE EPIDEMIC

The natives crowded out of the village on to the beach at the approach of Ellen and Sherwin. For a moment they stood looking and chattering excitedly; then they scattered amongst the palms, some going to the houses, others making for the bush at the rear.

"Whatever is the matter with them?" Ellen asked. "They seem frightened or something."

Her companion did not answer, and presently he got hold of one of the men and asked him the whereabouts of the house of Bamu's cousin. The native looked affrightedly at Ellen and mumbled that he did not understand. Whereupon Sherwin took him by the hair and shook him roughly. "No humbug, now! Show me house, one-time quick!"

"Nobody sick," the native said, wriggling. "Cousin belong Bamu go take spear and look for magani (wallaby)." He pointed towards the bush generally.

The white man wound his fingers in the other's fuzzy hair very tightly and glared into his eyes. Ellen was looking on wonderingly from a little distance off. Sherwin lowered his voice so that she could not hear, but there was no mistaking the meaning and earnestness of his tone.

"You show me that house damn quick"—he hissed the words—"or might be some very bad thing happen longa you." He directed the man's glance towards Ellen. The native understood at once; the white man was threatening him with the magical powers of the white misi if he did not obey at once —and did not everybody know what a powerful sorcerer the white misi was? He hesitated, mumbled and looked from one white to the other. Then he suddenly made up his mind.

"House here," he said, and led the way along the village street. He stopped at a house near the far end, and Sherwin and Ellen climbed the shaky ladder and squeezed through the narrow doorway. The interior was very dark and smelling vilely of the odors consequent on lack of ventilation. Sherwin burst a portion of the thatch of the wall and let in the light.

Lying in a corner, his head supported on a pillow that was merely a lump of wood, was a man. He was entirely nude, and he lay flat on his back on the bare, uneven floor. His eyes were closed, and over the lids

trickled two or three tiny streams of blood from a series of incisions in his forehead. On his breast was a mess of macerated grass, from which the moisture still oozed. He was a man of about middle age, as evidenced by the roundness of his limbs; but his face was drawn and shrunken, as though old age had come to one portion of his body alone.

Beside him sat three women in grass petticoats. Their hair and faces were smeared with whitish clay till they looked like a circus clown that had forgotten to redden his nose and cheeks. One of them held a bundle that seemed mostly grass-mat and banana-cloth. They had been moaning softly as Sherwin and Ellen entered, but stopped as the broken wall let in the light. They looked up blinking, fear and consternation in the expressions.

Sherwin pushed them aside and, kneeling, examined the man.

"Decidedly feverish," he said. "That's bad. I am afraid its the rubeola, right enough. The thing has sneaked in somehow. It was foolish to expect it could be kept out for ever. It will go clean through the village now."

"But it might not be——," Ellen began.

"I hope not, but I don't like the look of this fellow. Even the natives recognise that he has something seriously wrong with him. See, they have been cutting his forehead to let out a pain, and this poultice on his chest indicates that he has been complaining of being hot. Headache and a temperature are very unfavorable symptoms."

"But they might only indicate malaria or common influenza," Ellen said. "I think you are so anxious about the other thing as to suspect it where it does not exist."

The man on the floor remained in his coma-like sleep, breathing heavily and irregularly. As Sherwin stood up again the women renewed their moaning, and one began stroking the sick man's arm. A

number of faces appeared at the doorway, and from somewhere outside came an excited whispering.

Suddenly the bundle in the lap of one of the women beside the sick man moved, and the cry of a child filled the house. Before the women had time to resist, Ellen picked up the bundle and stripped its filthy covering. The child was a boy about a year old, chubby-limbed and scanty-haired. Its tiny fingers wound themselves in Ellen's blouse, and it buried its small black face with its tear-reddened eyes in a manner that indicated it recognised in the girl a protector and a friend.

"Poor little mite," Ellen cooed. "Is oo very sick? Don't oo cry." She stroked and hugged and petted it, a stream of baby-talk flowing from her lips. The women looked up uneasily, the faces in the doorway packed closer, a voice or two murmured threateningly. But the girl held the sobbing black form tight against the white of her dress and swayed her body to the chant of her words of comfort, all else forgotten save the knowledge that here was something in need of mothering.

She stood in the centre of the house, the light from the hole in the wall lighting up her face and revealing an expression of infinite pity. Sherwin's eyes had never seen a sight that made such a strong appeal to all that was manly in him, and once again the desire to wind his arms about this girl surged over him. For a full minute he stared at her; then a movement at his feet attracted his attention.

The sick man had turned on his side, and, as Sherwin knelt beside him again, his eyes opened. He started and sat bolt upright.

"No, no," he screamed, and his arm shot out and pointed at Ellen. "Puri-puri! Puri-puri! I no like! I no like!" He turned appealingly to Sherwin. "Taubada, you no let them make puri-puri! I no want!" His voice shrilled to a high falsetto, in which the prevailing note was of terrifying, agonising fear.

"No puri-puri," Sherwin said soothingly, pressing him back. "All good friend for you. You no fright." The sick man, exhausted and short of breath, lay quiet, but his eyes rolled from side to side and his lips moved with unuttered entreaty.

One of the women jumped up and snatched the child from Ellen's arms and pushed her way through the crowd at the doorway and out.

"Did she think I was going to hurt the little dear?" Ellen asked wonderingly. "She seemed quite angry. And what did that man mean by shrieking and pointing at me like that?"

"Natives are queer cattle," Sherwin said. "They get all sorts of strange ideas into their heads. It's all right. Don't take any notice."

"What did that man mean by screaming 'puri-puri' at me?" Ellen asked again.

But Sherwin was saved from the awkwardness of answering by the sick man coughing—a nasty, sniffling coughing that seemed to be almost entirely nasal.

"Catarrh," Sherwin said anxiously. "Rubeola is usually preceded by it. I don't think there can be any doubt now. What are we to do? To order complete isolation of this house is useless, for even if I were obeyed there can be no manner of doubt that other natives are affected by this time."

He examined the man again. "I'll get some stuff out of the medicine chest at the station and see that it is taken. Not that medicine is much good in cases like this without proper nursing and attention, but it's the best I can do. Let us get out of this."

The crowd at the doorway dispersed at the approach of the pair, and by the time they reached the ground the natives were scattering in all directions.

"I can't make them out at all," Ellen remarked, as they reached the beach. "I verily believe they are afraid of me! Do I look a very terrifying sort of person, Mr. Sherwin?"

The man laughed. "Not exactly. But the nigs

have never seen a white woman before, you know, and they don't quite know what to make of you. I did not see anything of Wilson," he added, by way of diverting the conversation. "I wonder how he puts in the time. I'll bet he feels it somewhat lonely."

"Only what he deserves," Ellen said shortly. For a time she was silent, her brows bent thoughtfully. Then she asked:—

"Can nothing be done if this epidemic is really here? It seems criminal that these people should suffer and die if we can assist them in any way. Is the German measles as fatal as you think? I thought it was mainly a children's disease, and not so very dangerous at that."

"That is so in civilisation. But natives go down and out to complaints that are almost harmless to Europeans. The trouble is that such complaints are foreign, and the constitutions of the natives are not able to successfully resist them. No; you will find this disease a very fatal one before it is wiped out of these parts."

"All the more reason then that we should bestir ourselves. You have plenty of medicine and things, haven't you?"

"Medicine is not much good; it's nursing and attention that are required. And isolation of cases. But what's the use of telling the niggers not to go into houses where there are sick people? They won't obey. It is their custom to gather beside a sick person and howl and wail and go on with a whole lot of ceremony. No power other than that of force will prevent them. Isolation would stop the spread of the disease quicker than anything, but how it could be managed I don't know."

Ellen was again silent for a time. Then she said brightly: "Perhaps we are worrying ourselves for nothing. It may not be rubeola at all."

But Sherwin was pessimistic. "I wish I could only hope so. But I am afraid there can be no doubt

about it. The next stage will be an eruption on the man's skin, within the next couple of days, or so. By that time there will be a score of cases."

For the rest of the day Ellen went about her self-imposed household duties in a very thoughtful manner. Sherwin wondered what she had in mind, for he knew she was thinking about the epidemic. Once or twice he tried to draw her out, but she skilfully dodged the subject, and it was not until he was enjoying his after-supper smoke on the verandah that she enlightened him.

The sea-breeze had continued further into the night than had been its wont for the last few days, and the coconuts rustled as though their time for sleep had not yet come. The air was filled with the droning sounds of the night—the hum of mosquitoes, the buzz of hard-shelled beetles about the lamp, the long-drawn-out oo-oop of an owl in the palms. From the natives' quarters came the sound of Bamu's voice in a subdued chant, and from the village came the usual beating of a tom-tom. Sherwin was leaning back with his feet on the railing when Ellen dragged up a chair and sat down.

"I've thought it all out," she said. "And with your help there should be no difficulty. The three of us——"

"Three!" Sherwin interjected.

"Mr. Wilson has got to help, also. In a case like this we can't afford to let personal dislikes interfere. Now, here is my plan: The 'Mokohu' would make an ideal quarantine hospital. She is well clear of the water and is very roomy. We could put a hundred patients into her. It won't matter much about beds, for the natives are not accustomed to them anyway. The quarantining and attention are the main things. I suggest that to-morrow morning we take that man and child to the schooner and keep them there. I will do the nursing if you and Mr. Wilson will look out for further patients and see that none of the healthy people get on board."

"But what if Wilson objects? You will be turning him out of his shelter."

The line of Ellen's mouth set very firm, and her eyes flashed brightly in the lamplight.

"He must not object," she said. "If you can't make him see the idea in a favorable light, I will. Now, what do you think of my plan?"

Sherwin hardly knew what to think. The natives would most certainly object to being taken away from their relatives and placed in the care of the person whom they regarded as a malignant witch. They would regard such a course as going straight to their deaths. It would mean taking the sick people by main force and without assistance from any of the villagers, for it could be safely counted upon that not a native would lend a hand. Then, would Wilson help? Sherwin doubted very much if he would.

"I don't know," he answered slowly. "It's not as simple as it sounds."

"Now please don't start making difficulties or finding them," Ellen said. "I know it's not a simple plan, but there is a chance of it doing something for those poor people. Think of that baby! Even now I can feel its little black body, all hot and trembling, clinging to me. What mere difficulties should we let stand in the way of saving, or attempting to save, it —and fifty like it? I am sure, if you spoke to the natives and explained things, they would understand and make no protest to our looking after them."

Sherwin puffed at his pipe without speaking. He knew how utterly useless it would be to adopt the course of reasoning with the natives that Ellen suggested, but the light of an idea was filtering into his mind. Could he work on their belief in witchcraft in some way? Would it be possible to undermine the power of Olpo, the sorcerer? At first the thing seemed impossible and absurd; then he thought he saw a way by which it could be managed. He took the pipe from his lips and stared out across the darkness, his forehead creased with thought.

"Do you think you can manage it?" Ellen asked, watching him closely.

Sherwin started. "I don't know yet," he said slowly. "I will try."

"I am so glad!" Ellen exclaimed, clapping her hands. "I knew you would do all you could. I will speak to Mr. Wilson in the morning."

For a time they sat silent, each thinking of the work that lay before them; then the girl rose, and, bidding her companion good-night, went to her room.

In a minute or two she was back. "Not one of the women are here to-night," she said. "Not even Lapa. I wonder where they have gone. Every night up till now they have been in the room waiting for me."

"I expect they are fooling around in the village," Sherwin said, a sudden fear entering his heart. "They will be along later on."

"I expect so," she nodded, and retired for the second time.

Sherwin knocked his pipe out and stood up.

"The women have been told not to come to-night," he said to himself. "I wonder why? Olpo contemplating mischief?"

He went down the steps to his bunk beneath the house and lay down. The drumming in the village had ceased, although it was yet quite early, and Bamu's chanting voice was stilled. There was only the ripple of the surf, the rustling of the coconuts and the hum of the mosquitoes. The man on the bunk lay thinking hard. Presently he slipped his hand under the pillow and brought out a heavy revolver and buckled it about his waist out of sight.

"It seems to me that I had better have my little talk with the niggers at once," he muttered. "Olpo is bent on an early manifestation of his powers; those women are not staying away to-night for an idle reason. It's up to me to get in first."

He swung on to the ground and went up on to the verandah. Tip-toeing, so as not to arouse Ellen, he

went to the table and turned up the lamp to its fullest.

"They'll see the light and think we are not in bed yet," he muttered again. "She will be safe till I come back."

Then he left the house and went off in the direction of the village.

CHAPTER XII.

COUNTER WITCHCRAFT

For such an early hour the village was unusually quiet. New Guinea natives love to while away the first of the night with the gossip of the day or the lazy chanting of favorite dance-tunes to the accompaniment of a softly beaten tom-tom. In little groups they will lounge beneath the palms when the heat of the day is done, and smoke their bamboo pipes or chew beetlenut with much rattling of lime-pots. Perhaps after a time the languor of the night influences some of the old men to recitation of folk-lore; to relate, in subdued tones that carry an ever-deepening sense of the awesome, tales of the times when fishes talked and mountains were possessed of mobility. And men and women and children would drink it all in, the adults knowing that only by word of mouth can their legendary history be preserved; the children revelling in the mere narrative.

But as Sherwin entered the village street there were no groups beneath the palms, no beating of tom-toms. It almost seemed as though everybody had gone to bed or that the place was deserted. But on the verandahs of some of the houses small fires glowed, and now and then there was a murmur of voices. In the darkness the houses were mere shapes,

hazy and indistinct, their roofs lost in the welter of drooping palm-fronds. To the white man walking along the deserted street there was an eerie something in this unusual quiet that sent a trifle of a shudder through him.

Without stopping, he went straight to the Dubu. In the darkness there was no break between the black hull of the "Mokohu" and the front of the meeting-house. Sherwin climbed the ladder and stood for a moment on the narrow porch, listening intently. Then he loosened the revolver in its case beneath his pyjama coat and shouted: "All you feller come here!"

For several seconds there was no response; then a babel of shouts arose, and a number of figures carrying torches of bundled grass came running. As the light of the flares lit up the front of the Dubu, a dozen men pushed through the doorway. There was little room on the porch, and Sherwin grasped one of the supporting studs of the wall to prevent being pushed off. He watched the men as they came out blinking into the light. Presently he heaved a sigh of relief as the small, withered figure of Olpo appeared. Sherwin worked his way to the side of the sorcerer, and then into a position so that both were on the front of the porch in clear view of the people below. By this time the whole of the villagers were assembled in front of the Dubu, all whispering excitedly. Sherwin held up his hand to enjoin silence; then, as the voices died away, he spoke:— "Who been say white misi big puri-puri feller?" He went straight to the point. "Who say she make all trouble for this place?"

He paused, as though waiting an answer, and glanced at the painted sorcerer by his side. Not a man spoke or moved. All eyes were turned to the pyjama-clad white man standing on the edge of the porch. He was their Taubada, their master, their source of supply of all sorts of goods, and they listened in respectful silence to what he had to say.

"I savee," Sherwin went on. "I savee what all you feller think. You all think white misi too much strong puri-puri feller. You all talk like that. Now who been tell you?" He looked round the crowd of upturned faces and called two or three names. "Rampa, Meo, Marai, you feller speak. Who been tell you this thing about white misi?"

The men shuffled uneasily, and one of them said, hesitatingly:—"We no savee. We no——"

"You savee right enough. Come on, tell me."

"Mightbe you too much wild for we feller. You no like we talk white misi savee make puri-puri."

"I no wild——," Sherwin began, when Olpo interrupted with a flow of impassioned words. The sorcerer had drawn himself very erect, and he rolled his eyes as he spoke and gesticulated. He delivered his harangue as though in one breath, and, though the words tumbled over one another till they seemed nothing more than a disordered succession of guttural sounds, there was no mistaking their import. The white man standing beside him knew as well as if he possessed a full knowledge of the language that Olpo was denouncing Ellen—that he was categorically evidencing the troubles that had befallen the village of late as directly due to her malignant influence.

The natives listened intently, not a man moving or speaking, and when the sorcerer's declamatory voice reached a shrill falsetto at the end, and then stopped dead, there was a long-drawn sigh from a hundred throats, and the crowd began to surge uneasily.

Sherwin waited till they were somewhat still again. Someone had started a fire of quick-burning sticks on the sand, and, as the light flared up, the trader spoke:—

"Olpo tell you white misi savee make puri-puri. I listen and I hear him. You feller all believe that thing about white misi?"

The natives, fired by Olpo's impassioned words, immediately answered:—"Yes; we believe."

There was a hum of excitement, and the white man waited till it died down. Then he said very slowly and deliberately:—

"When Olpo speak that white misi savee make puri-puri he speak true!"

He waited again, for there was a general exclamation of surprise that the trader should confess to Ellen being a witch.

"White misi savee make puri-puri very much," he went on presently, repeating the words in order to give emphasis to the statement. "I think white misi more big puri-puri feller than anybody. She is the one big-feller medicine-man."

The natives were distinctly uneasy now, and they crowded to the foot of the steps threateningly. Sherwin looked down at them calmly, glancing out of the corner of one eye to see if Olpo was still beside him.

"More better we kill that puri-puri misi," said a voice in the crowd. "No good she stop here and kill we feller."

Other voices joined in. Why should they let this witch work her evil way against them? was the burden of what they said. Especially now that their Taubada had told them she was a strong-feller sorcerer. She must be a very bad witch when their Taubada talked about her like that.

Sherwin held up his hand again, and the voices subsided slowly. When all was quiet, he pointed to the sorcerer at his side. "Olpo is a great puri-puri man," he said. "He savee plenty." There was a murmur of assent. "But white misi is too much strong puri-puri man. She savee more thing than Olpo."

He waited for this to sink in. Then:—

"She no bring sickness, she no make schooner break longa beach, she no make big sea and big wind. She no do this thing. She good friend for your people."

"Who been bring this sickness and them other thing?" the voice asked again.

Sherwin half turned and took a grip of the sorcerer's shoulder. "Olpo," he said.

Instantly there was uproar. The crowd cried that such a thing could not be. Olpo was their friend, and they had done nothing to displease him, anyway. White misi was the one, they shouted, and they surged forward like a wave about to break.

The sorcerer tried to wriggle himself free of the white man's grip, a stream of what was clearly invective flowing from his lips. But Sherwin's grip was tight, and presently Olpo, exhausted and out of breath, quietened down. Sherwin faced the crowd again, and the uproar ceased as they saw he was about to speak.

"Olpo been make this sickness," he said. "But white misi is more strong puri-puri feller than Olpo. She will take the sickness away. Olpo bring it; white misi take it away.

The sorcerer had got some of his breath back, and he again addressed the crowd. When he finished, Bamu spoke from the outer edge of the mob:—

"He say you no speak true, Taubada. He say white misi no much strong. He go make puri-puri one-time quick and white misi hurry-up dead."

"All right," Sherwin said. "We see who more strong."

"He say white misi dead before sun come up," Bamu volunteered.

"All right, we see," Sherwin repeated. He still kept his grip of the sorcerer's shoulder. Then, raising his voice so that the farthest away native could not fail to hear, he said:—

"Olpo say he more strong than white misi. He no speak true. White misi more strong than Olpo. She number-one feller. Olpo say he make white misi dead. Mightbe white misi make Olpo dead. We look bye-em-bye."

In the incredulous murmur that followed this statement Sherwin's quick appreciation of native

moods detected a tone of doubt. He released Olpo and muttered savagely:—

"Get now and do your worst. I've succeeded in laying the foundations for undermining your influence, you damned old scoundrel. You will have to show what you can do very soon, or your fame will go up in smoke."

Olpo slid away from the white man and made for the steps, but Sherwin brought him back.

"No you don't," he said, producing the revolver and prodding the other to the doorway. "You go in there so that I can get a start." He brushed the other natives aside and thrust the sorcerer through the opening. Then, as he went to the head of the steps to descend, he caught sight of a dark figure moving away from the mast of the "Mokohu." The distance from the porch of the Dubu to the mast of the stranded schooner was only a few yards, and, the fire on the ground flaring up at the moment, the figure moved. Sherwin saw that it was Wilson.

"He has been standing there all the time," Sherwin said to himself, as he reached the ground and started off along the beach. "I was wondering if he was somewhere handy, and dreadfully afraid he would interfere and spoil things."

The natives clustered round him as he went along, all asking questions and hanging on his answers. Sherwin took the utmost advantage of the occasion to further impress upon them the fact that Ellen, although a witch, was their friend, a powerful friend who would drive away the sickness. He pointed out the advantages that would accrue from having such a friend; how if they obeyed her what a lot she could do for them. It would pay them to keep her kindly disposed, he hinted darkly. And the natives felt much impelled to believe him; he was their Taubada and a reliable friend who had never failed them. Still, they said doubtingly, Olpo was a great man, and everybody knew what he could do. They did not like to run counter to his wishes. Did not a man at

Kerema die on the third day after a full moon just as Olpo said he would? Was it not Olpo who had sent a strange head-sickness to a Lahari woman so that she threw herself from the top of a coconut-tree and broke her neck? And who was it brought the rain to bring life to the gardens when a five months' drought had killed every yam and sweet potato? And the mighty schools of salawere fish at a time when it seemed the sea was empty? None other than Olpo. He had prophesied these things, and how could he know they would come true if he had not made it so? Truly, Olpo was a very great man and his words were the words of truth. He had said he had not brought the sickness to Wallala, and what could they do but believe him?

But Sherwin insisted that Olpo was to blame, and that the white misi was a greater and more powerful sorcerer. She would take away the sickness Olpo had brought, he reiterated. When he sent them back to the village at the gate of the compound, Sherwin congratulated himself that he had shaken their belief in the powers of Olpo to some extent, at any rate.

On reaching the house, he went straight up on to the verandah. The lamp was still burning at its fullest, and he was relieved when he peeped in the door of the bedroom and saw that Ellen was fast asleep. The girl was lying on her side, the mosquito-net lifted at the head for coolness. On a table near the bed was a turned-down hurricane lamp, with a book stood upright and so placed as to shield the light from the sleeper's face.

Sherwin turned down the verandah lamp to its lowest and sneaked away.

"She is lying there so peacefully that it seems horrible to think of all the lies I have told about her to-night," he said, as he reached his bunk between the piles of cargo under the house. "I wonder what she would say if she knew?"

He filled his pipe and lit it. "I hope that fellow Wilson does not tell her," he muttered. "He heard

everything." He stretched himself out on the bunk and smoked for a few minutes. Then he rose and twirled the barrel of his revolver to see if it was in perfect working order.

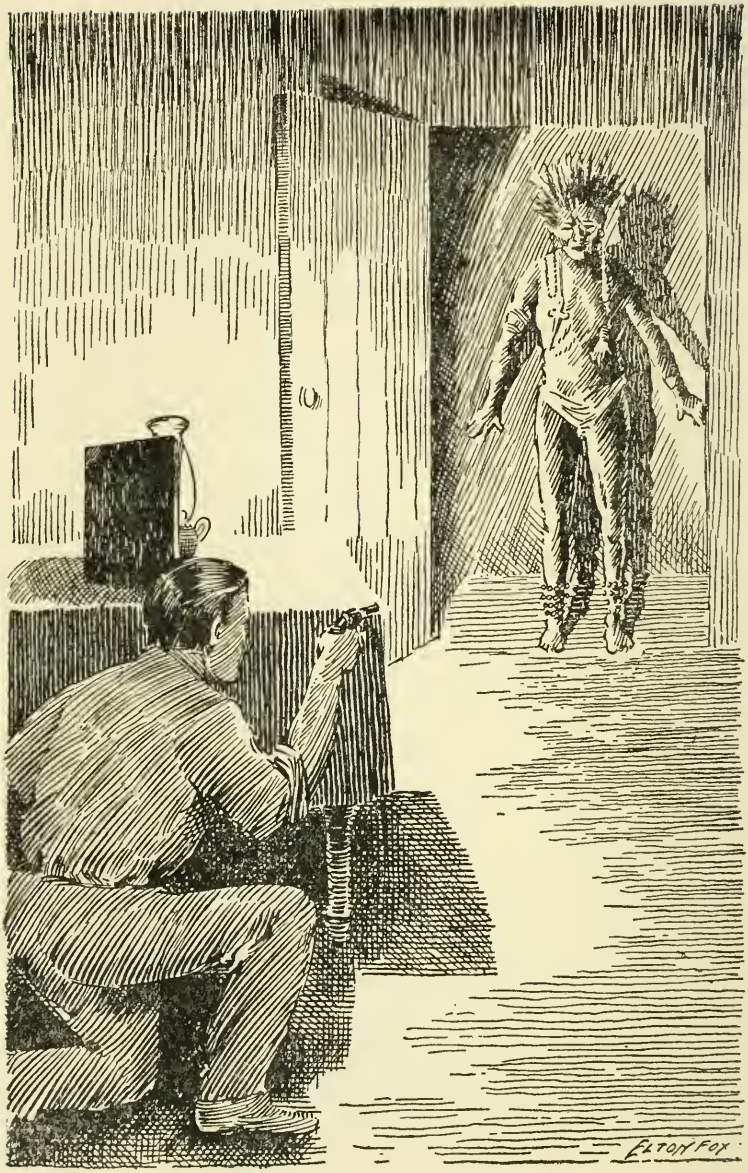
"I wonder how long it will be before Olpo makes a sign? The old brute will not lose much time, that's certain. He knows his reputation is endangered. I won't lie on the bunk—I might go to sleep, and that would never do."

He took up a position on the ground against a bale of sacks that had formed part of the "Mokohu's" cargo. From here he could keep a close watch on both the front and back steps, and he crouched down, revolver in hand, watching and waiting. He knew sorcerers possessed such belief in their powers as to be capable of thinking they could cause death or injury to a victim merely by means of incantation or the holding of a ceremony. Many of them possessed a fair working knowledge of the power of suggestion and by it achieved results. But the trader was also aware that a sorcerer might not be any too trustful of such means when the intended victim was a European. White people were different from natives; they knew too much, and their heads were not filled with superstition. Other means would be necessary—and that was the reason Peter Sherwin kept close watch of the steps with a revolver in his hand.

The long hours passed slowly, and nothing happened out of the way. Once Sherwin thought he heard a footstep approaching, but on going to see he found nothing. Once or twice he walked round the house to relieve the cramp of his muscles.

"It might well be that I am acting the fool," he said to himself, shortly after the moon rose. "It would be a very daring thing for Olpo to come here and try anything. He knows I will be on the lookout, and that I would knock his head off if he were caught."

But he did not relax his vigil for all that, although



"The next moment he dodged behind the table and hid in the shadow of a book." p. 115

his tired frame called out for sleep, and he had to walk up and down to keep awake.

About two in the morning a strange restlessness came over him. He wondered if Ellen were all right, and he was anxious to make sure. He stood still and listened as he had done a hundred times before, but there were no sounds save the ripple of the surf and the rustling of the coconuts. Satisfied that it would be safe to go up on the verandah, he slipped up the front steps and went to the girl's room. It meant leaving the back steps out of sight for the time that it took to reach the verandah, but the moonlight was bright and there was no sign of anybody about.

The moon was flooding the doorway of the room with soft white light that made the thatch of the walls glisten as though silvered. Sherwin went into the room and saw that Ellen was still in the same position, the light of the turned-down lamp showing that she was breathing easily and regularly, the book still shading her face. Satisfied as to her safety for the time-being, he turned to tip-toe out.

The next moment he dodged behind the table and hid in the shadow of the book. For, standing in the doorway, his withered form outlined against the background of moonlight, was Olpo. He was standing perfectly still, and his hands were raised as though in benediction. For a full minute he stood thus: then, with a gliding, snaky movement, he began to advance into the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLPO MAKES AN ATTEMPT

In the centre of the room the sorcerer stopped. The lamplight was sufficiently strong to illuminate the front of his body and reveal his markings and ornaments. The man crouched in the shadow at the

head of the bed saw that he had made himself up specially for the occasion. He was wearing the full insignia of his art. His hair was plastered into an array of tapered points which stood out from his head in all directions like a bunch of monstrous bristles. From his ears to his shoulders drooped strings of small beads and dog's-teeth, and his cheeks were streaked red on a background of white. In the loop of his nose was a hoop carved from a single shell. Suspended from his neck, so that it hung over one breast, was the dagger of cassowary-bone. On the other side was a human hand that had been severed close to the wrist. It was a small, withered thing, with half-clasped fingers, and here and there the dirty-white of a knuckle-bone showing through the smoke-dried skin. The sorcerer's arms were beribboned with strips of red calico, and his legs were festooned with circlets of small brown beans. He was entirely nude, and the whole of his body was smeared with colored earth.

For a full minute he stood perfectly still with raised arms in the centre of the room, and the white man, watching with straining eyes, silently drew his revolver and held it in readiness. The sleeping girl made no movement.

Presently Olpo lowered his arms and raised himself on his toes. Then he began to turn round and round, slowly at first, but with increasing speed. He moved absolutely without sound, his ornaments being fixed in some way to prevent their rattling. As his twirling increased he raised his arms to the right-angled position, lowering them a little from time to time as though in regulation of his speed, in the manner of the governor of a steam-engine. Sherwin likened him to some sort of fantastic toe-dancer, and wondered at the agility of such an old and feeble-looking man.

After a time the whirling apparition slowed down and finally stopped. For a moment he stood erect, facing the head of the bed. Sherwin steadied the

revolver against the edge of the table and took careful aim at the hand suspended over the sorcerer's left breast. The range was about five yards and a miss impossible. With his finger pressing the trigger so that the hammer was on the point of rising, Sherwin waited.

Olpo began the second part of his performance by slowly raising his hands high above his head, palms inward, the fingers bent like a grisly's claws. Then he as slowly lowered them to his sides and raised them again. He repeated the movement a dozen times, and every time the hands neared the plastered hair Sherwin pressed the trigger just a little bit more. It was a favorite sorcerer's trick to carry a small, but very venomous, snake in a bamboo tube hidden in the hair to throw at the victim. The snakes were trained to return to their owners on the completion of their task, and the victim would be found dead. with nothing to show what killed him. The bite of the snake was such a tiny thing as to escape casual notice, and the sorcerer's reputation for killing his victims without leaving a mark would go up by leaps and bounds.

Sherwin was taking no chances of Olpo working the snake trick. He was firmly resolved that if the sorcerer's hands as much as touched his hair to drop him on the instant. But the claw-like fingers went up and down without going too near the plastered head, and the white man heaved a sigh of relief when they stopped and the sorcerer turned and made towards the door.

But at the door the painted figure stopped and again faced the bed. He raised his right arm till it stood straight before him, still and rigid as iron, with a talon-like forefinger pointing. For a moment he stood thus; then he began to advance with the gliding, snaky movement he had used at first. It was a sinuous creep, in which the locomotor muscles seemed to move of their own volition. It was not suggestive of stealth. The white man in the shadow at the head

of the bed likened it to the advance of some horrible, slimy creature of the ocean depths approaching its prey fully confident of its power. Sherwin felt a curious sense of fascination steal over him as he watched. The sorcerer's figure was directly between him and the moonlit doorway, and every detail of the creeping devil's outline showed sharp and clear. Sherwin caught himself comparing the peaks of twisted hair to bundles of spears standing points up. He started and took a tighter hold of the revolver. Had Olpo some power or knowledge of mesmerism? he asked himself. He would need to be careful. He kept his eyes on the outstretched finger. It was a very long finger, and as it approached the lamp he could see that it was corneous, and that the yellow nail hung long and curved like a parrot's beak.

The night was very still, the ripple of the surf being hardly heard in the room. The wind had died down, and it seemed as if the mosquitoes had fled from the presence of witchcraft. The silence wrapped Sherwin like a blanket. He felt it was smothering him, and he wanted to cry aloud. Strange influences were at work on him. He shivered, and a drop or two of moisture came out on his brow. His eyes seemed unable to leave the slowly advancing finger. it was half-way across the room now, and the face of the man behind it was set hard in an expression that was Satanic. Sherwin managed to glance at the glittering eyes, but the finger quickly attracted his attention again.

Should he awaken Ellen? The question had raced through his brain a dozen times in as many seconds. She would probably die of fright, he reflected, if she were to be rudely awakened from a quiet sleep to see the creeping apparition and its pointing finger bearing down on her. Alternatively, should he shoot the sorcerer? The sound of a shot so close to her head would give her as big a fright. Sherwin decided to wait a little longer.

Olpo was very close now, and Sherwin saw that

the man's face was screwed up so that the eyes were merely narrow slits, through which a section of the pupils burnt like coals. The finger was only about two feet from Ellen's face. The girl began to stir uneasily, and, as the finger moved closer and closer, her lips moved.

Sherwin decided the thing had gone far enough. He shifted the revolver to the other hand, so as to allow him the more easily to grasp the sorcerer's arm. He still kept the muzzle of the revolver up at the painted body above him. Then, just as he reached out for the sorcerer's arm, Olpo looked from the sleeping girl's eyes straight down at him and the steel muzzle aimed at his heart. Like a flash he straightened his bent body, turned, and, before the white could do anything to stop him, was across the floor and through the doorway.

Sherwin felt inclined to laugh. His relief was so great that the reaction almost unbalanced him. He seemed to have been hours watching the sorcerer performing the rites of his office, but he knew by the position of the moon shadows on the verandah that he had not been more than a few minutes in the room. They were a crowded few minutes.

He glanced at Ellen, who was sleeping quietly again, and then he crept out. He went to the other room and took out a bottle of brandy and poured some into a glass, which he took out on to the verandah.

"The old devil!" he muttered, drinking off the spirit. "He is more of a power than I thought. I wonder what was the end he had in view?" He searched for and found some packets of cigarettes, and sat down on one of the verandah bunks and smoked.

"I declare I am more shaken than I thought would be possible," he said to himself. "No wonder the niggers are frightened of him. I will have a tough job in proving Ellen a more powerful sorcerer than Mr. Olpo. But what a devil of a fright the old fiend

got when he looked down into my face and saw the revolver pointed at him!" He laughed and stretched himself on the bunk.

He did not deem it wise to sleep under the house after such an experience. The sorcerer might return later on, and, as he had managed to get into the house without being seen once, he might do it again. Sherwin carried the stretcher into a position from where he could see the door of the bedroom, and from then on till daylight he lay and smoked one cigarette after another.

The first of the grey light of the new day was spreading over the eastern sky when a footstep caused Sherwin to get up and go round the corner of the verandah. It was Bamu, and the old native's face wore an expression of mingled sorrow and anxiety.

"Well, what's matter?" Sherwin asked, softly, so as not to disturb Ellen.

"White misi?" Bamu breathed.

"What about her?"

"She—she—she all right?"

Sherwin nodded and smiled. "Of course. She all right number one feller."

"She—she no dead?"

"Dead! No! Who can make dead?"

"Olpo say——"

Sherwin infused as much contempt as possible into his voice. "Olpo no can do thing like that. He no savee nothing." He laughed quietly. "White misi too much strong feller for Olpo."

But Bamu doubted still. He wanted the evidence of his own eyes to convince him that white misi still lived.

"That woman, Lapa, too," he added, pointing to the ground. "She want look——"

"Good morning, Mr. Sherwin," Ellen's voice interrupted, and the girl herself appeared. She glanced at the tumbled blanket and creased pillow on the stretcher. "How did you sleep? I see you have

repented of your decision to camp in the uncomfortable place under the house."

At the appearance of Ellen, Bamu immediately went to the steps and spoke to somebody on the ground.

"Too many mosquitoes down there," Sherwin lied. "How did you sleep?"

"Not so badly. But I had a horrible dream. It was a dreadful thing. I thought somebody kept threatening to drive a spear into me, pushing it closer and closer till it almost touched my eyes."

"Did you waken?" Sherwin watched her closely.

"No; which is rather strange, for usually when I have dreams of a horrible sort and as vivid as this one was, I wake up in a shiver."

Bamu, followed by Lapa, came along the verandah. The young native women went to Ellen and touched her arm and back. "You no sick?" she asked.

Ellen looked at her surprisedly. "I am not sick a little bit," she said.

Lapa sighed and looked up into the white girl's eyes.

"Me too much glad," she said simply. Then, without a further word, she went into the bedroom, and those on the verandah could hear her working at tidying up the place.

"Isn't she a curious character?" Ellen asked. "She seemed quite relieved to see me. What happened that she and the other women did not sleep here last night?"

"I suppose they got to yarning in the village till it was so late that they were afraid to disturb you," Sherwin put her off. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Bamu going along the beach in the direction of the village.

It was not long before natives began to dribble up from the village, and when Ellen and Sherwin sat down to breakfast there were curious black faces peeping at them from all over the compound. One or two

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bolder spirits climbed the verandah and tip-toed to the corner and peeped round.

"What on earth is the matter with the natives this morning?" Ellen asked. "Look at them through the blind there. They are looking up here. What is wrong?"

"There is nothing wrong," Sherwin said. "They are probably waiting to see me on trading business."

"They never came so early in the morning before," the girl said, suspiciously; "or in such numbers, either."

"They take silly fits sometimes. Don't be alarmed; everything is all right."

"I know they don't mean mischief." Ellen said. "I am not afraid."

After breakfast the trader invited the girl to the storeroom.

"I am going to make some presents," he explained. "I give the best workers—the people who supply the most coconuts, and so forth—a few things from the store occasionally."

"How good you are to them!" Ellen exclaimed, as they left the house.

"Purely a matter of business," Sherwin said. "It sets them seeing who can supply me with the most stuff."

He opened the door and they went inside. Sherwin made a collection of leather body-belts, jew's-harps, hand-mirrors and other things, and carried them outside. He called to the natives watching from a little distance to approach, and as they came he said to Ellen in a careless tone:—

"It would please them immensely if you distributed the presents. It doesn't matter to whom you give any particular item; they are all good workers."

To his delight, she jumped at the idea. "That will be great," she said, clapping her hands. "I have wanted to give the poor things something ever since I came."

The natives formed a half-circle about the door.

There were about thirty of them, men and women and a sprinkling of children. Others were coming along the beach.

"White misi want to show she good friend belong all you feller," Sherwin said, speaking loudly so that all should hear. "She want to give you present. You all see her here. You look good, now." He paused. Then: "You can all see she all right; she number one."

"Why do you say that?" Ellen whispered.

"I am merely explaining that it is you who is making the presents," the trader answered hurriedly. Before she could ask for a more satisfactory answer, he was again addressing the natives:—

"She very good friend for you. She give you all kind of thing, and bye-em-bye she make sickness go 'way from village. You feller believe that?"

Two or three voices answered affirmatively, and Sherwin signed to Ellen to begin handing out the presents. He made each man and woman come up in turn and take his gift from the white girl's hands. One or two showed traces of fear, but the majority were almost reverential. When each had received something, there were still a few mirrors and jew's-harps at Ellen's feet. She looked at Sherwin.

"The kiddies?" she asked, and, on the trader nodding, she picked the things up and pressed them on the children.

The immediate result was that the youngsters pressed about her, some clinging to her dress, others taking her hand and stroking the white skin. Their elders looked on contentedly, and made no attempt at taking the children away.

Sherwin smiled to himself.

"They've seen her alive and well, and they know by the presents that she is well-disposed towards them. Olpo, your cake is dough!"

He drove the crowd away at last, and as the pair returned to the house Ellen said:—

"Doesn't a little kindness go a long way?"

"Yes," he answered. He would have liked to tell her what a mighty long way it was going in this particular instance.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILSON COMPLIES

"I am anxious to see how the sick man and that dear little baby are getting on," Ellen said a little later. She was putting on her panama, the native girl, Lapa, watching with wide opened eyes. "There might be fresh cases, too."

Sherwin was standing in the doorway of the room. "Come on, then," he invited. "I had just come to tell you I was going to the village. This is to be our busy day; we have to get our quarantine station ready."

"I hope Mr. Wilson does not make too much bother about giving up the ship," Ellen said, putting the final touches to the position of her hat. "I think, though, that when I explain the danger to the natives he will see the value of my idea and be reasonable. Why, there could be no better place than the ship for isolating the sick! Once on board, they would have no hope of escaping, and the others could not get in contact with them without our permission. We could never attain such complete isolation with a house."

"No; you are right. The ship is the thing." Then, as the girl signified her readiness to depart, the trader led the way to the steps and helped her to the ground. Lapa followed, and Sherwin, seeing she wanted to ask something, turned to her.

"Me come?" Lapa asked.

"What for you want come?"

The native girl looked at her mistress. "I want

stand-by close-to white misi," she said, simply, and Sherwin nodded.

"Lapa has taken quite a fancy to you," he said to Ellen, as they started off. "She is showing a great deal of affection."

"Perhaps I have bewitched her," Ellen laughed. "Anyway, I am glad I have made a good impression."

"You have made more than a good impression on me, I am afraid," Sherwin thought. She had got a little in front on the path that wound through the coconuts, and the man looked steadily at her slight figure with the sunlight playing in the hair that peeped from beneath her hat. It struck him that there was something strangely unreal in the fact that this girl—a real white girl, with just the style of face and figure and the right tint of hair that he had always loved—should be there in living reality before him. And in his keeping and care! It was wonderful that such a thing could happen to an isolated trader like him, surrounded by ignorant savages. She, the first white woman he had seen for years, was just the type that had always appealed to him! It did occur to him that the appearance of almost any white woman would have been pleasing to his eyes—eyes that had so long starved for sight of a female of his kind. Also he was aware that long exile was liable to automatically adjust his appreciations. But he put the thought from him.

"I am also afraid that Lapa is not the only one bewitched," he said to himself. Then he pulled up the trend of his thoughts with a jerk. There was more pressing business on hand than merely contemplating on the pleasure that this white girl gave him. He had made up his mind to prevent Ellen speaking to Wilson about the use of the schooner, and so giving the mate an opportunity of telling her how the natives accused her of being a witch. Wilson had heard and seen all that had passed the night before, when the trader and the sorcerer stood on the porch of the

Dubu, and it might well be that he would blurt out an account of the occurrence.

"I think it would be as well if I interviewed Wilson," Sherwin said, as they went along the beach. "After what has passed, it would be rather painful for you to——"

"Thanks," Ellen said, looking at him. "Put the case strongly, won't you? We can't allow these natives to suffer and die just because Mr. Wilson objects to our using the ship."

Natives flocked round as they neared the village. Many walked backwards in front of the pair, gazing at Ellen and making clicking noises of wonderment with their teeth. Others followed behind, whispering awesomely. Lapa began talking rapidly in her own language, from time to time indicating Ellen with a side movement of her head. Sherwin anticipated Ellen's query as to the meaning of it all.

"They are talking about the presents you gave them," he said. "They regard you as being their great friend."

"How grateful they are for such a small thing! But it's you they ought to be grateful to; the things were yours, not mine." She beckoned one of the children—a little toddler with a rounded stomach and big eyes. The child went to her at once and placed its fist in her outstretched hand. Immediately there was a scramble for her other hand. Sherwin made as though to drive them off.

"Let them come with me," Ellen said, and, with the children clinging to her hands and arms, she turned into the village.

"You see Mr. Wilson," she said. "I'll have a look at Bamu's cousin and the child and see if there are any more sick."

Sherwin hesitated. He was not sure that it was altogether safe to allow the girl to go into the village by herself—Olpo might be about and take advantage of her being unprotected to try some more of his tricks. He stood watching her going up along the

street, and the friendliness of the natives reassured him. They surrounded the girl like a guard of honor.

Resolving to return as quickly as he could, he hurried to the schooner and scrambled on board. He found Wilson in the cabin reading. The mate looked up quickly as the trader's form appeared in the entrance, and he put down his book and stood up.

"Well?" he said.

Sherwin flung himself down the steps and faced him.

"The epidemic is here," he said, going straight to the point. "It won't be long before there are scores of cases."

"So I gathered from your remarks last night," said Wilson. "Is Miss Russell quite well?"

"Yes. It is at her suggestion I have come to you. She is much concerned about the effects of this disease, and suggested that we should use the schooner as an isolation hospital."

Wilson did not answer immediately. He looked keenly at the trader, his eyes narrowing to mere slits. Sherwin glanced at the bunk and saw that the book the man had been reading was a treatise on Navigation. And a wave of pity came over him at the thought that this man had been trying to while away the time with such a dry-as-dust subject. He determined to supply him with some books and magazines from the station.

"And what about me?" Wilson asked presently.

"See here," Sherwin said abruptly. "Don't you think you are acting the goat by going on like this? You must know you are in the wrong when you speak of Miss Russell. Why not apologise to the lady and let us all be friends again?"

Wilson flushed. "We will not talk about that, please," he said coldly. "About the use of the schooner, as it is Miss Russell's suggestion, I would prefer to discuss the matter with her herself." He spoke very deliberately and slowly. Sherwin looked

at him intently. There was something about the man he did not understand. Sherwin noticed that his eyes brightened at the mention of Ellen and it struck him that his attitude was not that of a man disgusted with the girl. The trader wondered was Wilson jealous and planning a means of getting even.

"You would not tell her what you heard last night?" he said anxiously.

"About the natives accusing her of witchcraft?" The mate's tone was angered. "That would be a fool thing to do." He stopped and breathed heavily. "The fright might kill her," he breathed. "Why speak to her at all about using the schooner? You have heard all there is to hear from me."

But Wilson repeated he preferred to see Ellen about the matter personally, and the trader, seeing he was not to be gainsaid, gave in. "You will find her in the village," he said, making up the steps to the deck.

Wilson jumped up after him. "In the village! Alone! Why the devil did you leave her when you knew that that old fiend of a sorcerer is just waiting for such a chance? By God, Sherwin, I thought you would take care of her!" He ran to the bow and, without bothering with the hanging ladder, sprang down on to the sand. Then he tore up through the coconuts and along the village street.

Sherwin stared astonished.

"Well I'm damned!" he exclaimed, after awhile. Then, slowly and thoughtfully, he left the vessel.

As he turned the corner of the Dubu and came into full view of the street, he saw Ellen and Wilson standing beside one of the houses, the mate keeping the circle of curious natives off with occasional gestures. The heads of the pair were bent in close converse and presently they shook hands. Ellen looked up suddenly and saw the trader approaching. She came running, clapping her hands.

"It's all right, Mr. Sherwin," she cried. "Mr. Wilson thinks my plan a very good one. And he is

going to help us with the sick natives, too. Isn't it just splendid?"

Her eyes sparkled. Her cheeks were flushed, and her voice was pleasurably excited. She seemed to radiate happiness. Sherwin felt decidedly uncomfortable. It annoyed him that a few words of Wilson's should delight the girl so.

"Mr. Wilson will live on the schooner just the same," Ellen rattled on. "He will be able to keep a watch at night that none of the patients try to escape. I'm so glad things have worked out so well, aren't you?"

"Yes," Sherwin answered curtly and somewhat ungraciously. "Did you find or hear of any more sick natives?"

"No. And I have not even been in to see the man and child. Those women and children would not let me leave them. I believe they almost worship me."

"Let us go now," said Sherwin. "Where is Wilson going with those men?" He pointed to where a dozen men were following the mate to the beach.

"He is going to make a start at fixing up the inside of the schooner at once," Ellen informed him. "Clean up the hold and so on. This is the house, isn't it?"

They went up the ladder and pushed through the doorway. The women who had been sitting by the sick man yesterday were still there. From their appearance and position there was nothing to suggest they had ever moved. Ellen saw the baby in the woman's lap, and she took and held it without protest from its mother.

Sherwin knelt beside the man. He was gasping and sniffling, and the trader found that his temperature was very high.

"This man will have to be taken to the schooner as soon as possible," he said, rising. "He is in a bad way. How's the baby?"

Ellen looked down at the tiny form in her arms.

"Very ill, I am afraid," she said. "I can feel its poor little body burning like fire. We will take both

of them as soon as the vessel is ready." She returned the child to its mother, and they left the house, Ellen remarking as they reached the ground:—"It's a wonder there are not more cases."

"There will be soon enough," the trader said grimly. "Now, if you will go back to the station and see what the medicine chest holds in the way of fever-reducing drugs, I'll go through the village on the hunt for sick folk. There is a book of instructions in the chest."

She went at once, Lapa a yard behind her. "Now's my chance to explain the advantages of listening to the white misi's advice," Sherwin muttered. "She will be quite safe at the station."

He went to the Dubu and mounted to the porch, a hundred natives assembling on the ground beneath. Sherwin entered the Dubu and found Olpo sleeping in a cubicle at the far end. Without disturbing him, he crept out. "I know where you are, at any rate," he said to himself. Then he spoke to the people below. Now that Ellen was not there to listen he was able to speak more fully than he had done at the door of the storeroom. He told how the threats of Olpo had failed to materialise, and pointed out that the white misi still lived and was well, despite the threats of the most powerful sorcerer in three districts. They had seen her with their own eyes and taken presents from her own hands. Was that not proof? Could there be any doubt about white misi's power of resisting inferior magic?

The natives shouted and clicked their teeth. The white misi was truly a wonderful sorcerer, they cried, and she was their friend, and they were glad. They wanted no more proof.

Then Sherwin came to the root of his discourse:—

"This bad sickness come, but if you feller listen to white misi it go 'way one-time quick. White misi tell me to tell you feller that all sick man and sick woman and sick piccaninny must go stop longa schooner, and white misi make well." He repeated

it several times, and the crowd shouted they would listen to the wisdom of white misi. They were quite enthusiastic about it, and when Sherwin descended to the ground again, they crowded about him with assurances of their desire to please Ellen by obeying her wishes.

Satisfied at the knowledge of a good work well done, he went aboard the schooner and found the mate at work in the main hold with the natives.

"I'm glad you did not raise any objections, and are willing to lend a hand," said the trader.

"Why should I object?" Wilson looked up at the man on the deck above him. "You did not expect that I should see those poor devils die just for the want of a little attention, did you? You can trot your first patients along immediately after lunch." He gave his attention to the natives shifting the dunnage-planks, and Sherwin left.

Somehow he was feeling depressed. It was a sensation almost foreign to his nature; his life had been for many years a far too busy one for time for moody fits. He had never felt like this before, for beside the depression, there was a sensation of irritation. Yet everything had gone off as well as, and better than, he could have wished. He had worked the natives round to his way of thinking, the power of Olpo's influence had been heavily discounted, the schooner was being turned into an isolation hospital. There was nothing to grumble about.

As the trader went along the beach to the station the brightness left his eyes and his face took on an expression that was almost sullen. At the gate of the compound he stopped and looked back towards the stern of the "Mokohu," showing round the point of the beach. He was beginning to discover what was wrong with him. A light was breaking in on him. He flushed hotly, trembled and shook his fist at the schooner's stern.

"Damn you, Wilson," he muttered,

CHAPTER XV.

THE SCHOONER-HOSPITAL

That afternoon Bamu's cousin and his small son were taken to the schooner. The villagers raised no objections. Some of them volunteered to help carry the sick man, but Sherwin, fearing that such contact would accelerate the spread of the infection, transported him in his own arms, while Ellen took the child. There was no appearance of Olpo, and on the trader making enquiries he learnt that the sorcerer had not been out of the Dubu all day.

Wilson had arranged a kind of platform down either side of the "Mokohu's" main hold. They were crude affairs of planks of odd lengths and varied thicknesses, supported on oil-drums and empty cases. Several layers of coconut-fronds were spread on top, and here and there a grass-mat or cloth of banana-fibre. Through the open hatch came abundance of light, and the mate had seen to it that there was no bilge-water lying stagnant beneath the floor and that the place smelt sweet and clean.

Sherwin laid the sick man on the ready-made bunk and covered him with a blanket from the stock in the storeroom at the station. Ellen placed the baby some little distance away and made it comfortable. She expressed her delight at the way Wilson had arranged the place. "You have done very well, indeed, Mr. Wilson. We could easily accommodate forty patients. I am very pleased." She smiled at the mate.

"It's a very rough affair, I am afraid," Wilson said. "We have not the things to make a proper job of it. Coconut-leaves for mattresses and not a sheet or pillow in the place! What would Sydney people say to a hospital like this?"

"It does not matter in the least what they would say," Ellen said, cheerfully. "We are doing the

best we can. It will serve our purpose of isolation."

Sherwin had brought a number of medicines from the station, and Ellen administered a febrifuge to the sick man. She made him as comfortable as possible, and soothed the child when it burst into fits of fretful crying. For an hour at a time she sat on the bunk with the black morsel in her arms, rocking it and cooing words of comfort. She set Wilson and Sherwin re-arranging the fronds and mats so as to render their condition more comfortable. She had them heat condensed milk on the primus stove in the cabin and bring it to her for the child. She set them a dozen minor tasks. And they obeyed quickly and willingly, for they realised that this slip of a girl had taken charge of matters. Ellen showed that this business was her province, and the two men bowed to her superior right. Each watched her with unconcealed admiration. Each recognised and appreciated the sympathy and loving kindness she bestowed upon the two invalids in her care. Sherwin felt absurdly envious of the dirty, black-skinned savage who was Bamu's cousin.

Wilson and Sherwin spoke to one another never more than was necessary. Sherwin was distinctly conscious of a spirit between them that was anything but friendly. And Wilson made no advances to dispel it. At times it made the trader's blood boil to think that the mate had not apologised to him for his conduct and the things he had said and hinted, and he felt like taking him aside and having it out. But Ellen's change of attitude deterred him. The girl had most emphatically stated she did not wish to see or speak to Wilson again; now she was apparently as friendly with him as ever. It seemed rather extraordinary to Sherwin, and he worried about it and at last put it down to the vagaries of the feminine mind. He had read about such things.

During the afternoon the sick man's wives came to the beach beside the schooner and called the trader. He went up on deck, and they begged to be allowed

on board. They wanted, they said, to sit beside their husband; the mother of the child cried to have her baby. Sherwin was hard put to it to convince them that the invalids were safe in the care of the white misi, and that they would soon be well, but he managed it at last, and the women went away.

"That is going to be our main trouble," he said to Ellen on going below again. "The niggers can't bear to leave their sick. They want to wail and make a fuss at the bedside and apply all sorts of foolish remedies."

Ellen's mouth set firm. "They are not to come, that's all. I look to you and Mr. Wilson to see that no healthy native sets foot on this vessel. Will you attend to that?"

"Yes," both answered together.

At sundown Ellen declared her determination to stay aboard the schooner all night.

"Will you bring my things from the station, Mr. Sherwin? My patients may want me during the night."

Sherwin disliked the idea immensely. "You will be very uncomfortable here," he pointed out.

"What does that matter? I will be all right. At any time now there may be a score of cases, and I want to be on hand. Please don't object—it won't be of any use, anyway; I'm determined."

Sherwin was much averse to leaving her so close to the Dubu, and the sorcerer bent on revenge. He could not leave her unprotected save for the presence of Wilson, who was a stranger—a new-chum to the country and the ways of the natives. He glanced at Wilson. Besides . . .

"In that case," he said deliberately, "I am camping here, too."

"You will please yourself about that, of course," Ellen said coldly.

Sherwin left for the station at once. It was almost dark when he returned with a half-dozen natives carrying blankets, food-stuffs and Ellen's belong-

ings. He and Wilson hoisted the things on board by means of ropes, and carried them into the hold. Ellen took some of the food-items and retired to the cabin. Presently she called the others and they found an appetising meal set out on the table beneath a swinging lamp. It was the first decent meal Wilson had tasted for some days, and he made no secret of his appreciation.

"This sort of thing is enough to make any man swear off 'batching' for keeps," he said once, and Sherwin, happening to glance at Ellen, saw the color mount to her cheeks and her eyes sparkle. He saw her smile into Wilson's face and bow graciously. A wave of anger swept over him. His heart raced and the veins of his forehead throbbed. He had never thought the girl would treat so kindly the man of whom she had spoken so vehemently. It angered him that his belief in her earnestness should have been misplaced. It angered him that she should accept compliments from one who had so grossly insulted her.

With an effort Sherwin forced an appearance of seeming calm, but long before the others were finished, he made an excuse and went up on deck.

The night was very still. The quiet was conducive to thought and retrospection. Sherwin paced the deck, thinking. His mind was a welter of confused impressions. He was trying to reconcile Ellen's behaviour with her previous anger. He was jealous of Wilson. He was disappointed in Ellen. After a time he cooled down and attained a clearer perspective. And for the first time it came home to him with terrific force that this girl was very necessary to him. All his manhood cried aloud for her. He loved her. He knew it beyond doubt, and his heart sang her name. He loved her despite her vagaries and weakness. The knowledge drove away his anger against her, dispelled his disappointment, and left him firmly resolved to win her. It also left him jealous of Wilson.

And his jealousy was destined to be fiercely fanned that night. Ellen seemed to be favoring Wilson very particularly. It was the mate she consulted about various little incidents as the night wore on, it was he whom she asked to call her if she were needed when the time came when she lay down for an hour or two's rest. Not that she ignored the trader; she spoke to him frequently and always with accustomed courtesy; but Sherwin sensed a difference. It made him all the more determined in his resolve.

The two men had arranged to take watches by turns. Sherwin took the first, Wilson sleeping on the deck beside the top of the cabin, to be called at midnight. For the first hour, Sherwin walked up and down, then he sat down by the stump of the mainmast and smoked pipe after pipe.

The land-breeze had come up a couple of hours after sun-down, and the night was delightfully cool. The black velvet of the sky was besprinkled with a million diamonds that reflected blue-white points of light in the sea. The high tide reached as far as the schooner's quarter, lapping her sides gently. The front of the Dubu stood black and dismal at the end of the broken bowsprit, a huge, somewhat uneven triangle leaning a trifle out of the perpendicular. Sherwin looked at it and wondered what Olpo was doing. There was no gleam of firelight from the building, but the watching man knew that that did not indicate the people inside were asleep.

From the other end of the village came the slow, soft wailing of one of Bamu's cousin's wives, and from the river at the back came the voices of chorusing frogs.

Sherwin estimated the time as being near midnight, and was on the point of rising to call Wilson to take his watch, when a woman's voice in high-pitched falsetto ripped the quietness. It was a wail that the higher it rose indicated deeper despair, a harsh, grating howl that rasped the nerves like the sound of an

unoiled wheel. Before it had reached its topmost note, another voice joined in, then another, and another, till there was a score or more. The steady beat of a tom-tom sounded and the lights of flare-ups appeared amongst the coconuts. Wilson had been awakened at the voice of the first woman, and he and Sherwin stood looking and listening for a moment.

"What the dickens is the matter?" Wilson asked. "It sounds like Sheol broken loose."

Ellen appeared beside them, her hair hanging loose.

"There's no danger," Sherwin assured her. "I don't quite know what is wrong, but we shall soon know; I see lights coming this way."

A dozen men crowded to the vessel's side, all chattering and looking up at the three whites on the deck above them. In the light of the flaring torches they looked a ghastly assemblage.

Sherwin quietened them with a gesture, and a man in the centre spoke:—

"One feller dead. He dead jus' now."

"What's matter he dead?" Sherwin asked. "I no hear about anybody been sick."

There was a little silence, then the native answered hesitatingly:—

"He been sick one week now. He been catch plenty sore longa face."

"The rash!" Sherwin and Ellen ejaculated together.

"What's matter nobody tell me that man been sick before?" the trader asked angrily. "I been give order that when anybody sick somebody must tell me. Who been make this 'nother kind fashion?"

He glared down at the up-turned faces, and the natives shuffled uneasily.

"We too much fright for Olpo," said one. "That feller say no good we tell you."

"We think that sickness too much strong," said another.

Ellen touched Sherwin's arm.

"The first thing is to get that man buried," she said. "Then to find out if there are any more sick in the house. Never mind just now about your orders being disobeyed."

"I'll go at once." Sherwin went to the bow and down on to the beach. The natives took him straight to the house of the dead man. A crowd was wailing in front of, and around, the place, and from the interior came an intoned chant. Sherwin brushed the crowd aside and climbed the ladder and squeezed through the doorway.

By the light of a small fire of dry twigs that burnt in the centre of the floor he saw a dozen men and women huddled about the dead man. They beat their hands against their thighs and moaned dismally, not one looking up or taking the least notice of the trader's entrance. Sherwin pushed in between two of the women and examined the dead man. He was a youth in the early twenties, and his naked body was smeared from neck to heels with clay and macerated herbs. His eyes were wide open and staring and one of his arms was doubled under his head as though for a pillow.

Sherwin struck a match and looked closely at the face and head. Close in to the roots of the hair of the forehead and about the neck were numbers of tiny red spots, irregular-shaped and elevated.

"The eruption!" he exclaimed. "There can be no doubt about it now."

He shouted to the wailing natives to cease their noise, and presently their voices trailed off into silence. He questioned them as to how long the man had been sick, and why the case had not been reported to him before. One of the women answered to the effect that the dead man was her son, and that he had been stricken four days ago, and that Olpo had impressed upon her the futility, the danger, of telling the trader about it. Olpo had told her that the illness was the white misi's doing, and that Sher-

win was aiding and abetting her. There was much more to the same effect, and Sherwin waited patiently till she had finished. Then he went all over the ground he had traversed so often in the last day or two. The dead man at his feet was a powerful argument in his favor, and it was not long before it was evident that the mother and the others were being convinced that Olpo's denunciation of Ellen was false. Olpo had said he would save the man, but, lo! the man was dead. There was no getting away from that. Olpo's powers were failing him. Obviously it was rank foolishness to trust to such a sorcerer, a sorcerer who did not carry out his promises. How much better was it to hearken to the white misi who was their friend and unfailing?

The women nodded, and the men grunted agreement. They had been foolish, they said, but in future they would listen to the words of the white misi. They had always had doubts about Olpo's friendliness, anyway, and it might well be that he had deliberately caused the death of this man.

Sherwin won them round—these sticklers for the old order, these people who had disregarded their fellow tribesmen's statements and belief of the greatness of the power of the strange white woman as compared with that of Olpo—and when he ordered the immediate burial of the dead man, they hardly demurred. Not that they were pleased with having to part with their beloved dead so soon—there are all sorts of ceremonies connected with a death that natives are fain to dispense with—but it was the white misi's order, and that was enough.

A hole was scratched in the sand at the back of the village, the dead man was slid into it, coffinless and unclothed, and the sand heaped over him. Sherwin returned to the schooner, leaving the women and others seated about the grave, the mournful chanting of the mother bewailing her lost son sounding in his ears.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHERWIN IS UNEASY

At daylight it was evinced that the villagers were deeply impressed by the death of their tribesman and the failure of Olpo to save him. Of their own accord they brought four patients to the schooner—two men and two women—husband and wife in each case. One pair had been ill for four days and were in the eruptive stage; the others exhibited febrile symptoms only.

While Ellen and Wilson arranged them on the bunks in the hold, Sherwin questioned the natives as to whether there were any more unreported cases. But the villagers insisted there were none, and they promised to bring to the vessel without delay any fresh cases that should occur.

The three Europeans had breakfast in the cabin, Ellen having managed to turn out a meal that was remarkably good when the limited means at her disposal were considered. Sherwin watched her at the coffee-pot end of the table with eyes that drank in the freshness of her appearance, that admired her easy grace and coolness in an unusual situation. She talked on general topics in the most matter of fact way, and discussed matters in connection with the epidemic. "I am afraid it is all up with Bamu's cousin," she said once. "He seems very low, and I doubt if he is conscious. He is not a young man, and I suppose his chance of recovery is limited to that extent. Does it not seem criminal that these people should die like this in an age when medical science has reached such a pitch?"

"To all intents and purposes it is the stone age here," Sherwin said. "You can't have the benefits of civilisation and simple freedom, too. Like everything else worth having, it has to be paid for. Doing

without is part of the price." He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Ellen looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, made as though to speak and then thought better of it. For a time there was silence, then Wilson said:—

"It's a pity we could not bring the contacts on board, also. Our efforts will be seriously discounted by their being at large to spread the disease."

"We would need a dozen schooners if we did that," Sherwin said. "It would mean isolating the whole village."

Ellen put down her knife and fork and sighed. "I thought of that," she said, "and it's worrying me dreadfully. But what can we do? If we do what we can for the actually sick, it's our utmost."

"As it is, the schooner will soon be filled up," Sherwin remarked, glumly. "There will be dozens of cases soon. The whole business looks to me a hopeless proposition, if not a foolish one."

"It is nothing of the kind!" Ellen's tone was very sharp. "And even if it is, can you suggest anything better?"

"There are six hundred natives in the village——" Sherwin began, but the girl interrupted him.

"Why try making difficulties? It does not help, and things are bad enough as it is. What we are doing seems the best way, the only way, we can assist these people, and I am determined to do all I can for them. Isn't that the proper thing, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, of course," the mate answered readily, and Sherwin muttered beneath his breath:—

"He agrees with her—naturally." And from then on till the end of the meal he was silent.

Three more cases arrived during the morning—two youths and a girl. One of the youths was in a very bad way and delirious. He struggled with his bearers, scratching and biting so that they had the greatest trouble to get him to the vessel's side. Wilson and Sherwin managed to get him aboard and

down into the hold. But soon after he was laid on the bunk, his false strength left him, and he quietened down. Ellen looked at him alarmingly.

"He has a very high temperature," she said, laying her hand on his forehead. "He is the worst case we have, so far."

The youth was breathing heavily and jerkily. He opened his eyes from time to time and looked around unseeingly. He muttered and coughed—the catarrhal cough that Sherwin had noted in the case of Bamu's cousin.

"How long has he been sick?" Ellen asked.

"The men who brought him said he was only stricken an hour ago," Sherwin answered. "It's the way with some of them; they go down as suddenly as though poleaxed. There will be plenty like him bye-and-bye."

The increased number of patients meant more work for the three whites, and twice during the day did Sherwin take some natives to the station for further supplies of medicines, food, and other necessaries. He sent a string of women to bring water from the river, and as they passed up the long bamboos they used for buckets, he emptied them into the ship's tank. He purchased quantities of drinking-coconuts, the "water" of which has virtues as a febrifuge, fresh fish, yams, bananas, sweet-potatoes, and other foods. A quantity of firewood was passed on board for a rude fireplace the trader and Wilson had constructed of opened-out oil-drums on the deck; the demands on the primus stove having grown too heavy. By means of an ingenious arrangement of poles and ropes they contrived to erect an awning over the after deck, and here was placed the cabin table and stools.

Ellen thanked them both very prettily.

"That is a great improvement; when we want a breath of fresh air, we shall be protected from the

blazing sunlight. Do you think we can stand a siege, now, Mr. Wilson?''

Sherwin swallowed hard. Why had she addressed such a question to the mate? he asked himself, angrily. Wilson was a willing worker and had helped a lot, but he was a new-chum, while the trader was experienced. It struck Sherwin that he was acting very much like a spoilt child, and he reproved himself accordingly. Still . . .

''Of course, I don't know much about it,'' Wilson answered. ''But it looks to me that if the whole village were to sicken, we could manage to look after a shipful of patients without outside aid for a time. Sherwin could tell you better than I, however.''

''We could feed fifty for a month,'' Sherwin said curtly in answer to the question expressed in Ellen's look.

''Thank you,'' the girl said, turning away and going below.

The rubeola was getting a hold on the village very rapidly. Eight patients arrived in one hour during the afternoon, and at sundown there were nineteen forms huddled and stretched on the bunks. Ellen had placed the males along one side of the ship and the females on the other. She hung several hurricane lamps, of which there had been plenty in the ''Mokohu's'' cargo, along the centre, and their half-light seemed to accentuate the unhealthy flush of the two rows of black faces and bodies.

Ellen worked hard, running from one to another with food; soothing and comforting; forcing medicine down unwilling throats. The two men helped her right royally, but they were glad when an opportunity offered to get up on deck out of that atmosphere of moans, sobs, and the smell of heated black bodies. But Ellen never seemed to require a rest. She was never still, and the perspiration streamed down her cheeks. Her blouse was wet through and stained with the clay from the bodies of the children she nursed. Sherwin went to her once as the night

wore on and pressed her to go to lie down, if only for an hour. But she refused.

After midnight he went to her again. Wilson was asleep under the awning, tired out, and Sherwin had decided to let him have another hour before calling him to take his watch. The trader had no wish to sleep; the night was fine and he was content to walk the deck and be ready to help the girl who worked below.

She looked up from beside a young girl who was tossing restlessly as Sherwin went down the ladder. He saw that her face was drawn, and her eyes heavy from lack of sleep. Without speaking, he put his arm around her and drew her towards the cabin. To his surprise she did not resent his action or resist. Her head fell on to his shoulder and without speaking, she allowed him to take her through the doorway in the bulkhead and place her on her bunk. She fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. For a few moments Sherwin stood looking at her, at her tired face, across which strayed a wisp or two of hair that had come adrift, at the steady rise and fall of her breast that told of deep sound sleep. Then he went back into the hold and walked along the centre of the two rows of patients.

On the necks and faces of one or two the first of the rash was making an appearance. Some lay quietly as though in healthy sleep, others moaned and tossed and muttered disjointedly. One young woman sat up, and looked at him with rounded eyes and begged for water in a voice that was scarce above a whisper. She drained the pannikin the white man gave her and, in obedience to his coaxing, lay down again and tried to sleep.

On the beach outside, right round the schooner were scores of natives chanting softly. Their mournful notes sounded clearly in the hold, softened, but none the less distinct. These people were relatives and friends who had come as close as they dared and could to their sick. Sherwin sat down beneath the

square opening of the hatch and lit his pipe. The moaning and sobbing cries of the patients, the expression of grief by those outside, the spirit of death that hung over the place like a threatening cloud. tangible and real, these things depressed him. He felt that all Ellen's efforts would avail for little. They had but a meagre supply of medicines, and no hospital appurtenances at all. None of them knew much about the disease or how to treat it. And the number of patients would increase rapidly each day. Soon there would be dozens of deaths, and the natives would begin to lose faith in the power of the white misi to save them. They would revert to the belief in their own sorcerers. The position looked very black to the man sitting in the dim-lighted hold amidst the fretful crying of the sick. It looked hopeless. And thoughts of Ellen's attitude towards Wilson did not cheer him any. His mind was filled with black jealousy. He thrilled at the thought that she had allowed him to put his arm around her, that she had let her head fall upon his shoulder as he took her to her bunk. Then cold reason dispelled the ray of sunlight as it told him that she had been so tired she hardly knew what she was doing.

The effect of it all was to render the trader very miserable, irritable and ill at ease. The time passed, but he did not heed it, and it was not till the first of the moonbeams to reach the opening of the hatch streaked the floor of the hold that he realised it was getting near daylight. He made another round of the patients and then went up on deck to call Wilson.

The natives on the beach were crouching beside small fires on the sand. In the moonlight their clay-plastered bodies looked ghastly, the markings on their faces giving almost fiendish expressions. As Sherwin appeared, they spoke one to another and held out their hands in supplication. They murmured entreaties for the giving back of their sick. Sherwin

quietened them as well as he could without arousing Ellen, then he went aft, to where Wilson slept under the awning. As he stooped to awaken the man, he glanced at the opening of the cabin. The curtain was drawn to one side, and there was an unobstructed view of the whole interior. The lamp hanging from the roof was turned half-down, but there was sufficient light to show that the place was empty. Ellen was not there!

Leaving the mate still sleeping, Sherwin jumped down the steps into the cabin and dashed through the door in the bulkhead into the hold. He ran along the full lengths of the two rows of bunks, some of the patients calling to him for water as he went. He took no notice of them. Ten seconds later he was on deck again, shaking Wilson roughly.

"Ellen," he said, as the mate sat up blinking, "Ellen is not on the ship!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE DUBU

Wilson sprang to his feet and the two men ran along the deck and scrambled over the bowsprit on to the porch of the Dubu. The same thought was in the mind of each. Neither spoke. And the fears that kept them silent caused them to halt when they pushed through the doorway and looked down the long passage between the cubicles.

At the far end a half-dozen painted chiefs were sitting in a circle on their haunches, each with a small flare of resinous wood in his hand. The light illumined the clay-markings of their faces and bodies and the bows and arrows, grotesque dancing-masks and skulls on sticks standing against the walls. One

chief wore through his nose a boar's tusk that formed a complete circle on each side of his face, another was so beribboned with colored plaited-grass streamers and covered with shell and dog's-teeth ornaments that the outline of his body was lost.

For a moment the white men stood staring. Then each gasped as he saw that in the centre of the circle Ellen was kneeling. The white of her dress, the glint of her hair, her pale, pure skin, seemed strangely unreal in that setting of savagery and superstition. She seemed so frail, so delicate, so fairy-like kneeling in that terrible circle, surrounded by the insignia of sorcery in the depths of the one place in the village that no woman may enter and live to come out of, as to seem a creature from another world.

Wilson and Sherwin tore along the corridor and thrust a sector of the circle aside. Then, in obedience to Ellen's request, they paused.

"The poor old chap is very ill," she said. "I think he is about done for." She reached out and touched the face of a man stretched out on the floor beside her—an old, withered man, with a human hand slung round his neck.

"Olpo!" Sherwin exclaimed.

"One of these men came for me some hours ago," Ellen went on, pointing to the squatted chiefs. "He must have tip-toed into the cabin, for I suddenly awoke to find him bending over me. He gave me an awful fright at first, and when I was about to call one of you, he signed to me to be silent. Then he went on with further signs to indicate he wanted me to go with him to see somebody who was sick."

"You should have called us," Wilson said.

"The man seemed to have a most violent objection to my doing that. He intimated most clearly that it was I he wanted, and that no one else would do. So, I got up and followed him—and here I am," she ended, simply.

Sherwin had grasped the situation at once. The reason of Olpo's non-appearance out of the Dubu

for the last day or two was that he was stricken by the epidemic himself. No doubt all sorts of charms and incantations had been tried by his colleagues, but as the patient became worse instead of better they became alarmed and decided to send for the white misi, of whose power they had heard such a lot. Besides, was it not known that Olpo had failed to kill the strange witch, and had she not promised through the mouthpiece of the trader that she might kill Olpo instead? Undoubtedly the white misi was the more powerful sorcerer, and it was due to her machinations that Olpo was stricken. What better could they do than bring the white misi to remove the sickness she had brought to their chief? All this passed through Sherwin's mind in a flash. He reached down and took Ellen's arm.

"Come out of this," he said. "You can do no good."

Ellen pulled her arm away. "Perhaps not," she said, a trifle angrily. "But it may be that I can soothe his last hours. He is only a poor old savage, but none the less a human being."

"But you don't understand——"

"There is nothing to understand. Here is a dying man——"

She stopped as a strange sound came from outside—sounds as of hurried feet and whispering voices.

"What is that?" the girl asked. "Will you please look?"

The circle of chiefs had heard it, too. One or two rose and went along the corridor to the doorway. The others looked at Ellen and Olpo with eyes that still patiently awaited some manifestation of the girl's power.

Sherwin picked up Olpo and slung him across his shoulder like a bag of chaff.

"Come on, Miss Russell," he said, making up the corridor. "We won't leave you. We will take this

man on board the schooner and look after him there. You stand by her, Wilson."

The seated chiefs had arisen quickly as Sherwin picked up the sick man. Olpo, their big chief, was being taken away from them. For a moment they looked ugly. Wilson swung Ellen in front of him and kept her in that position till they reached the doorway.

"Look!" Sherwin exclaimed, as they got out on the porch and looked down the deck of the schooner, bright and clear in the moonlight. "The crowd on the beach saw us come in here and took advantage of our absence to get aboard and try taking their sick friends ashore!"

About the deck numbers of natives moved about. Some were helping the sick out of the hatch, others assisted them over the rail to the beach.

"Oh, the poor silly creatures!" Ellen cried. "All our work will be undone now. Oh, what a shame! It's enough to break one's heart. And we were doing so well, too!"

The tide was about the schooner's quarters, and in the knee-deep water four or five men were placing the bodies of some of the patients, rolling them over and over and splashing.

"They do that to reduce the fever," Sherwin said. "They think the water will quench the fire that is eating up the bodies of their friends."

Ellen almost sobbed. "Can't you do something to stop them? That is the worst thing they could do. Stop them, Mr. Sherwin! Stop them, or not one will survive!"

The natives had been too preoccupied to notice the group on the porch of the Dubu, but when Sherwin took Olpo in his arms again and shouted, they at once stopped and looked up.

"What's matter you feller do like that?" the trader roared. "What kind fashion this?"

There was no answer, and one or two began to slink away.

"White misi proper wild," Sherwin went on. "Might be plenty feller dead now."

He lifted Olpo high in the air so that all could see.

"You look! Olpo! Close-up he dead! He no been listen to white misi."

A murmur of astonishment rippled up from the beach. Olpo nearly dead, and the white misi alive! They had seen Ellen follow the chief into the Dubu and at once concluded that she had fallen a victim to Olpo's wiles. And even if the most powerful sorcerer for miles around were not waiting for her in the gloom, no woman could enter a Dubu and leave it alive. After they had seen Ellen enter the building the relatives and friends were convinced that that was the last of the white misi, and as soon as Sherwin and Wilson had followed her and the coast was clear, they clambered aboard and began the removal of their sick. It would be Olpo they would have to fear now.

Yet, here was this strange woman alive and apparently unharmed, and Olpo nearly dead! It seemed unbelievable, and one or two suspicious voices muttered that perhaps it was a trick. Sherwin heard them. He turned to one of the chiefs behind him, and placed the sorcerer in his arms. Instantly, the chief cried out in a high-pitched voice, and the others began to wail.

"What is wrong with these men?" Ellen asked wonderingly. The trader took her by the arm and helped her across the splintered wood and tangled gear of the bowsprit. Wilson followed, and it was not until they stood on the schooner's deck that Sherwin answered the girl's question.

"Olpo is dead," he said softly. "He died while I was talking. He was already stiffening when I gave him to that chief."

Ellen said nothing, but hurried to the hatchway.

"The nigs will be convinced now," Sherwin said

to Wilson, as they watched the girl descend into the hold. "There will be no more trouble. All hands will obey readily enough from this on."

"And she won't know the reason of it," Wilson said. "Ought we to tell her?"

"Some day, perhaps. Certainly not now. She might not approve of what I did."

Wilson nodded and moved away. This was the longest conversation that had taken place between the two men since they had been on the schooner, and the dislike each felt for the other was momentarily forgotten. Only something connected with the interest of Ellen could have induced the trader to talk with Wilson at all, and he sensed it that the other felt the same way.

There was not much difficulty in getting the natives to bring the patients back to the schooner. The news of Olpo's death was all over the village, and voices were chanting and tom-toms beating—but softly—as though the mourners were afraid of Ellen's wrath that they should bewail the death of her enemy.

The effects of the removal of the sick and their immersion in the sea were only too plainly visible. Every patient was decidedly worse, and shortly after daylight there were three deaths. One of these was the baby son of Bamu's cousin. Ellen felt its loss very much.

"It was such a dear little thing," she said. "I just loved to feel its tiny fingers gripping mine. It was doing so well, too. If those silly creatures had not taken it away and dipped it in the water, I am sure it would have lived. Why did not you men, or one of you, stay here and watch them? I was safe enough."

Neither Sherwin nor Wilson knew what to answer. They could not tell her about the reputation for sorcery Sherwin had manufactured and sustained for her. The trader knew she would not understand

and would probably regard the whole thing as foolishness.

"We felt bound to make a search for you as soon as we found you were missing," Wilson said. "This is not exactly civilisation, you know, with policemen, street-lamps, and other safeguards everywhere." But the extenuation did not satisfy her.

"I think you were both very foolish," she said. "I would trust these natives will my life. They dress themselves up strangely, and have all manner of queer customs, but they would not dream of hurting me; they know I am their friend. The fact that that old chief sent for me is proof."

None of them felt in a very cheerful mood when they sat down to breakfast, neither did they improve as the day went on. During the morning there were four more deaths, amongst them Bamu's cousin and the young man who had given his bearers such trouble. Two died in the afternoon, bringing the deaths for the day up to nine. Numbers of sick were brought from the village, new arrivals coming in till well on in the night.

Sherwin lost no opportunity of impressing the villagers with the fact that if they had not interfered with the sick people on the schooner there would have been no deaths. It was not quite true, perhaps, for some would have died in any case, but it was a powerful argument in favor of obedience of the white misi's commands. The people brought their sick and carried away their dead for burial, more or less uncomplainingly, firmly convinced by recent events that their only hope lay in the hands of the strange witch that had been thrust upon them from the sea.

And Sherwin, watching, wondered what Ellen would say if she knew.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELLEN BREAKS DOWN

The epidemic travelled quickly through the village. By the fourth day the number of sick had increased to the extent of filling the schooner's hold. To accommodate the surplus, Wilson and Sherwin, at Ellen's suggestion, erected make-shift awnings of sail-cloth and sacking over the full length of the deck, and made up rude bunks on the hard boards. Fortunately, the weather held fine. There was no rain, and the air was cooled by the south-east trade which blew up with unfailing regularity each day, and gave place to the land-breeze at night.

The natives brought their sick readily enough. But it was more of fear of offending the white misi than belief she was their friend that governed their action. She had willed that the stricken should be given into her hands; and they obeyed the commands of she who had destroyed Olpo, the powerful sorcerer. But Ellen, knowing nothing of this, thought otherwise.

"Isn't it grand to see how they trust in us?" she said, one day. "They recognise I am their good friend, and that their methods of looking after the sick are worse than useless. As soon as a native takes ill now they bring him here. No more crouching beside the sick man in a musty grass-house and wailing and chanting and disturbing him generally. They bring him here at once. It is marvellous!"

"Revolutionary," Wilson said, with a glance at Sherwin.

"I thought native customs were too ingrained to render such a change easy," Ellen went on. "You told me so yourself, Mr. Sherwin. Yet, except for that night when the old chief died, we have had little trouble to make them give up their old ideas and accept the new. It shows they have a quick appreciation of what is really best for them."

It was hard, grinding work for the three whites couped up on that vessel of sickness and death. They allowed no healthy natives on board and, consequently, multifarious duties fell to their lot. Many of them were disagreeable, repulsive, but they worked uncomplainingly. The two men assisted Ellen during the day and took watches in turn at night, and Ellen was not backward in urging them on when they seemed inclined to falter, and in thanking them for work well done. The two men were open rivals for the girl's favors now, each watching the other as a cat watches a mouse. Once or twice they almost came to blows, for their nerves were frayed by the sights they continually witnessed amongst the sick, their tired muscles insufficiently rested. Sherwin, in addition, was continually irritated by the knowledge that Ellen had gone back upon her expressed dislike of Wilson. The man had insulted her most grossly, she had resented it, yet here she was on quite friendly terms with him. Indeed, she favored him more than the trader. Sherwin guessed Wilson had apologised and begged forgiveness, and the thought that it had been readily granted gave no surcease to his troubled mind.

Despite the unceasing toil of their nurses, some of the natives died.

"We could not expect to save them all," Ellen said, when Sherwin commented on this. "That would have been impossible, situated as we are. But we have saved a lot." She smiled wanly. "Is not that something to be proud of?"

The following day a dozen men and women and a cluster of children were sent ashore to their waiting friends and relatives. They were all thin and anaemic-looking, and some staggered from weakness. But the fever was out of their blood, and the last vestiges of the rash were gone. That night the chanting in the village took on a less mournful note, and the tom-toms' beat was brisker. From one house

came the sound of a joy-song, the almost-lilting voices having nothing of the grief-throb and despairing falsetto that had floated up through the palms every night for three weeks past.

Sick were brought to the schooner every day, but the number was quickly decreasing. The departures soon exceeded the arrivals and the joy-song spread to a score of houses. At intervals the dead were mourned, but the gladsome note was the more insistent.

The villagers took to congregating on the beach about the schooner, squatting on their heels in the blazing sunshine, watching the deck expectantly. Whenever Ellen appeared, they clapped their hands and made clicking noises with their teeth, their faces wreathing in smiles. Sometimes one or another spoke.

"They are thanking you," Sherwin explained to Ellen on one occasion. "They say you are wonderful. I don't understand their words, but the attitudes and expressions are plain enough."

"I knew they were grateful," Ellen said softly. "I am so glad we have succeeded as well as we have."

By the end of the fourth week of the outbreak, there were only a dozen patients on board the schooner, and none of them serious. The end of the long hours of nursing, of hard, unending toil and nights of broken sleep, was in sight, and Ellen sighed the relief she felt.

"Two or three days now, and there won't be a single case. It's been a long struggle and a hard one. I don't know how I should have got on without you two men."

She and Sherwin were sitting on the top of the cabin house beneath the awning. Wilson was somewhere below. The natives on the beach were looking up as usual, whispering amongst themselves, and pointing Ellen out to the smaller children playing in the sand. For the first time in some days, Sher-

win was able to get a good look at this girl who had worked so hard to save the lives of the ignorant, filthy savages he knew so well. It was with something of a shock that he realised to what extent the strain had told upon her. Her cheeks were sunken and there were dark rings about her eyes. The wonted freshness of her skin was gone or wilted as though from disease. She was absolutely colorless. Her shoulders drooped. She sat leaning against the broken stump of the mainmast as though glad of the support and ready to fall asleep. It was a picture of a tired-out girl that met Sherwin's eyes, a girl so utterly worn-out as to be almost physically helpless.

"And the natives don't know how they would have got along without you," Sherwin murmured. "You were our inspiration and theirs."

"Do you know, I will not be sorry when I can leave here and go back to the station," she said, looking at him. He saw here eyes were bright, that. despite her physical weakness, the spirit burned strong within her. "I am just longing for peace and quietness."

Sherwin jumped up. "You can have it now. There is no need for you to stay on board here any longer. The remaining natives will be all right in Wilson's care. Let me take you to the station at once."

She shook her head.

"Not yet, please. I am going to see this through to the very end. Now, I think I will lie down in the cabin for awhile, if you don't mind."

He helped her to rise and assisted her down the steps. As he turned to go back on deck, she smiled at him. It was merely a smile of thanks, but, somehow, it made Sherwin tremble and thrill. The memory of that smile lived vividly in his memory for the rest of the day, and at night his sleep was punctuated by a series of dreams in which the chief phenomenon was a tired-out Ellen smiling into his eyes.

Sherwin had kept a rough record of the number

of cases. There had been one hundred and eighty altogether, and with three exceptions all these had been brought on board the schooner. Out of this number, twenty-eight had died, eleven of them children, of ages ranging from a few months to twelve years. The rest had been adults of both sexes. All these had been buried in the sand at the side of the Dubu in the native fashion—upright in a narrow hole deep enough to allow the head to be covered to a depth of about a foot. The sand was heaped above each grave in a small conical mound surmounted by conch shells.

On the day before the last of the patients were ready to leave the vessel, Ellen asked Sherwin for his record. She looked at it, and then at the rows of shells dully white in the sunlight. She hid her face in her hands.

"Only for you there would have been five times as many," Sherwin said, endeavoring to comfort her. "Don't think about them."

"How can I help thinking about them? I can see those poor little children now, hear their baby voices calling and crying." She stared at the trader, dry-eyed and wildly. Her voice was harsh and choking as though from the unshed tears.

Sherwin jumped towards her, calling Wilson as he did. The mate came running from below, just as Ellen fell limply into the trader's arms.

"I'll take her to the station at once," Sherwin said. "She might be seriously ill after all this."

But Wilson had other views. "Why can't she stay here? I will look after her. She told me she did not want to go away till the last of the sick were well."

"Stand aside!" Sherwin roared. "I'm taking her out of this!" He strode along the deck with his burden, climbed down the ladder, which was immediately held stiff by natives on the beach, and set off for the station.

"My dear! My dear!" he whispered into her hair in an agony of heart. Unheeding of the watching natives, he bent forward and kissed her head. It was the lightest, softest, gentlest kiss in the world, but it seemed as though the girl sensed or felt it, for she moved slightly and seemed to snuggle closer in the man's enfolding arms.

Bamu, Lapa, and other natives came running as he approached the station. Sherwin ordered Lapa to return at once and make Ellen's bed ready. The native girl went right up to him and touched Ellen's arm and stroked her hair.

"Bed all ready," she murmured. "Bed been ready long time. I been wait, wait, wait for white misi come back."

The women begged for the privilege of carrying Ellen, but Sherwin roughly ordered them out of his way, and, with an air that expressed more than a hint of pride, went through the coconuts, up the steps of the house, and laid his burden on the bed.

The women were at his heels, and he gave them a few terse instructions, and left the room.

Half-an-hour later he was back. Lapa met him at the door.

"She sleep strong feller," she whispered, pointing to Ellen lying comfortably under the blankets. "You no wake white misi!"

"They worship her!" Sherwin said to himself, as he turned away after a long look at the tired, sleeping face beneath the mosquito-net. "They call her a witch!" He felt for his pipe and placed it between his lips. "For once they are right. She is a witch —and I am one of her victims!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THANKS-DANCE

Ellen slept the round of the clock, but it was not till another day had passed that she got up, dressed and went out on to the verandah. Her appearance was greatly improved; the look of tiredness was gone; some of the bloom had returned to her cheeks. She greeted Sherwin cheerfully and enquired about the epidemic.

"Not a case in the whole village," the trader answered. "The last patient left the schooner yesterday. Are you quite recovered?"

"There was nothing much wrong with me," Ellen laughed. "I was only tired out. It was very good of you to bring me here." She looked straight at him, a twinkle in her eyes. Sherwin guessed that Lapa or one of the other women might have told her that he had carried her from the schooner, but the twinkle caused him to suspect that she had not been as unconscious as he had thought. What if she knew about that kiss! Sherwin felt himself blushing like a school-girl, and it was with a mighty effort that he answered in a tone he fondly thought seemed careless:—

"It was nothing. Nothing at all. Only what anyone would have done." He hesitated, looked at her sharply, and then asked:—"Do you remember being brought here?"

Again Ellen's eyes twinkled, and a smile flickered about the corner of her mouth.

"It is mostly all rather hazy and indistinct," she said. "But I remember some of it all right." She turned quickly to the railing and pulled aside the blind. "What a lot of natives there are about! Some of them are our old patients!"

Sherwin jumped at this opportunity to change the conversation.

"They have been coming from the village in scores all the time you were in bed," he said. "Each time Lapa or one of the other women left the house, she was besieged with questions as to your welfare."

Ellen looked steadily at the natives clustered about the house and amongst the palms. The word had gone round that she was at the railing, and men and women and children formed an excited half-circle on the sand.

"They almost worship me!" Ellen exclaimed softly, and the trader saw her eyes were moist. "It thrills me." She waved her hand in greeting, and the villagers, with one accord, shouted their joy.

"Naturally, they worship you," Sherwin said. "You saved their lives and they are thankful. I heard they were going to have a big feast and dance in your honor."

Ellen had not asked after Wilson. Sherwin was secretly satisfied at this, and as the day wore on and she did not mention the mate's name, he felt that her dislike for the man had returned in full. He fervently hoped it was so, and that she would never speak of him again. But he wanted to discover the reason of her change of attitude to the mate on the schooner, and at supper he made a tentative advance.

"Wilson has been here half-a-dozen times asking for you," he said, slowly. "He seemed very anxious about you."

The news did not seem to affect the girl to any extent.

"Is that so?" she asked indifferently, and went on with her meal.

"He was here last night, and again this morning before you were awake."

Ellen poured out the tea, and passed Sherwin a cup.

"Indeed!" she said, coldly

"The natives will have told him by this that you

are up and about," Sherwin persisted. "He will be pleased."

"I daresay."

Sherwin gave it up at last. Evidently, Ellen was not to be drawn on the subject of Wilson. Sherwin was delighted at her indifference; yet he was somewhat irritated by her changes of attitude towards the mate. The girl puzzled him, but he saw that it was no use trying to worry causes and effects from her for the present, at least.

Shortly after supper, Bamu appeared on the verandah.

"All ready now, Taubada," he said.

"What's all ready?"

"Big dance. White misi come?"

Ellen threw down the illustrated magazine she was reading and looked up.

"What is that?" she asked. "Are there more sick?"

"No," replied Sherwin. "The people want you to go to the village to witness the festivities in connection with the rejoicing that the epidemic is over."

Ellen jumped up. "Of course I will go. It will be great to see the poor things expressing their joy." She ran into the bedroom and returned a minute later with her sandshoes on.

"Come on, Mr. Sherwin," she invited. "You must come, too. You are as responsible for the success of our efforts as I am."

The whole of the station natives accompanied them along the beach. Others from the village came along to meet them, so that the two whites entered the village with a following a hundred strong.

The sun had been gone an hour, and it being the period between the last of the south-east for the day, and the first of the land-breeze, the air was very still. The lower fronds of the coconuts drooped motionless, the topmost standing straight up against the background of stars. The tide was well up, the

foremost of the tiny waves lapping the ends of the trailing convolvulus vines.

A score of fires ranged down the centre of the village street. Their light reflected on the fronts of the houses till the grey-brown thatch gleamed and glistened, and it shone through the tall, cylindrical boles of the coconuts in a manner that streaked and crossed the ground with shadows. The natives were assembled in little groups beside the fires, all talking and laughing. The women were decked out in gala dress. In their hair were croton leaves and flowers of the flaming hibiscus, and from their ears hung long strings of dog's-teeth and small cowrie shells. Their breasts were cris-crossed with flower-chains. On their arms were toyya shells, bracelets, grass-circlets, and bands of red berries. They wore the most gorgeous of the neck-to-knee petticoats in their possession, some three or four, one above the other. Most of the men were painted and smeared with ochre. Many of them wore bean-armlets and anklets, some had feathers in their hair. But the number of the men was few compared to that of the women.

Ellen, noticing this, asked her companion the reason. But before Sherwin could reply a tom-tom at a fire further along the street sounded a single note. Instantly a score of others burst into a quick tattoo, and for a full minute rattled a time that was almost martial. Then, as though in response to a conductor's baton, they eased down into a slow, steady beat —a full-toned, throbbing pulse, rhythmic and deep.

All eyes were turned towards the further end of the street, and presently there was a murmur of long-drawn "oo-oohs" from the people beside the fires. Coming down the street, on each side of the row of fires, were four lines of men wearing enormous dancing masks and head-dresses. They lifted their feet high in their advance, prancing like a high-spirited horse, shaking their head-gear and rattling the strings of beans about their wrists and ankles. Half a step at a time they advanced, sometimes bow-

ing till their bodies were doubled, at others stamping hard on the sand with their naked feet.

The joy-song burst from five hundred throats at their appearance, the movements of the dancers in perfect time to the singing and the throbbing of the drums.

It was Bamu who volunteered a translation of the words of the joy-song:—

"They say:—'White misi good friend for us. White misi good friend for us. We like white misi too much al'gether.' "

"It doesn't sound very poetical," Sherwin said, with a laugh. "It doesn't rhyme, or anything."

Ellen grasped his arm and held it.

"Please don't," she said. Her tone was low, but the man heard her above the noise. "I am almost crying."

A clear space had been left in front of the trader and the girl, and as the dancers approached it the leading man of each line fell back and worked his way to the rear. Then the four lines pranced backwards for half the length of the street, and commenced the advance again. As they neared the clear space, the new leaders fell back in their turn, and again the lines went backwards. When this had been repeated three or four times, Sherwin knew that this particular dance would not finish till each eight of the whole hundred had occupied the leading position. He turned to the girl at his side. "They will keep this up all night," he said. "I am afraid it will give you a headache. Shall we return to the station?"

Ellen shook her head. "And disappoint these people? That would be cruel. I am enjoying it, anyway."

The singing and dancing continued far into the night. Pigs were killed and roasted on the fires, and great piles of cooked yams, sweet-potatoes, and other vegetables were handed round. A log had been brought for Ellen and Sherwin to sit on, and it was

so placed that the girl could have the bole of a coconut palm to support her back. Two or three times, Sherwin pressed her to return to the station, but she refused.

"You go, if you like," she said once. "I will be all right here."

"If you stay, I stay," Sherwin said firmly. Ellen made no reply.

About midnight, the dancers and singers rested for a time, and during the spell of quiet, Ellen jumped up and pointed.

"There is Mr. Wilson coming! I wonder he was not here before. Perhaps he was waiting till the noise ceased so that we could talk."

Sherwin looked at her wonderingly. A strange emotion seemed to hold her in its grip. Her fingers clenched and unclenched spasmodically, her body trembled. The trader was about to ask her if she were ill, when, with an abrupt "Excuse me," she left him and went to meet the mate.

Astonished, Sherwin saw her stop Wilson and hold him in earnest conversation. He would have given all he possessed to have heard what she was saying, but the pair were too far off for him to hear.

The tom-toms were throbbing out the overture of the next dance, when the girl returned. Wilson was walking slowly through the palms in the direction of the schooner. Sherwin saw that Ellen's eyes were very bright, and that the line of her mouth was tight and firm.

"We will go home now, if you don't mind, Mr. Sherwin," she said.

He rose at once, told Bamu to tell the villagers that the white misi was tired and would go to bed, and he and the girl went on to the beach and along to the station. All the way Ellen said not one word till she reached the door of her room, when she bid the trader a curt good-night. But, while Sherwin had respected her silence, he did not fail to notice an air of triumph in her bearing.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXPLANATION

At daylight Sherwin was awakened by Bamu shaking him gently and saying:—

"Boat come! Boat come!"

Sherwin rose at once. Half-a-mile from the mouth of the river was a big topsail cutter. There was not a breath of wind, and the vessel's sails hung flat and motionless. She rolled and swung, easily and idly, to the light swell.

"Lapa say Captain belong 'Mokohu' there," said Bamu. "She got good eye for look long way. She been go tell white misi."

From the village came a long-sustained "Sail-oh!" The beach was dotted with figures hurrying to the station.

"All to much sorry white misi mus' go 'way," Bamu murmured. "I think al'ogether make one big cry bye-em-bye." He looked up at the white man. "I think you too much sorry, too?"

"Sorry?" Sherwin said to himself, turning away. "The place will be unbearable when she is gone. I think I'll take a trip to Moresby, or somewhere."

He went into the compound and sat down on a fallen palm to watch the vessel that was waiting for wind to make the river entrance. In the fast-strengthening light one or two white-clad figures were visible on the after-deck, but the distance was too great for white eyes to distinguish forms and faces. Sherwin watched, depressed and miserable.

The sun was peeping over the edge of the clean-cut horizon and streaking the smooth surface of the sea with ever-broadening paths of shining gold, when Ellen appeared. She looked at the cutter, bid the trader good-morning, and sat down beside him on the palm-trunk.

"Lapa has been telling me things," she said pre-

sently. "I had something of a suspicion before, but now I know."

"Know what?" the man asked, half guessing what she meant.

"That the natives believe me to be a witch. And, oh, I think it was just wonderful the way you worked it—facing all these chiefs and others by yourself. Lapa dropped a word or two last night that set me on the right track, and I made it my business to worm the whole thing out of her."

"Then you are not annoyed?"

"Annoyed! Why should I be annoyed? You did it in the interest of the natives. I am very pleased, indeed."

She was silent a moment, then hesitatingly, she said, in a low tone:—

"I have a confession to make. My motives were not as wholly disinterested as yours. Please don't think me a horrible creature."

"I could never do that," he assured her.

She looked at him rather anxiously, as though uncertain that he would not think hardly of her.

"It was not altogether because I wanted to obtain Mr. Wilson's assistance with the sick people that I was nice to him. I had another reason."

Sherwin's heart went cold, and the sense of depression deepened.

"Yes," he managed to say. "And the reason?"

"A man would think it a most absurdly feminine one. It was—it was revenge." She went on with sudden decision. "I wanted to pay him out for what he said——. So, I allowed him to think I had forgiven him and accepted his apology. I made it appear I was willing to resume the relationship we enjoyed on the run across from Thursday Island." She paused. "Men like him, with minds like his, are not hard to manage when a woman sets out——"

"And last night you told him the truth?" Sherwin interrupted.

"I wanted to stay on the schooner till the very last

and tell him as I was leaving," she said. "But my plan of a dramatic ending was upset by my breakdown. I thought he would show up last night, and I was determined to wait till he did."

"He must have got a shock."

"I am not a bit sorry for him. Do you think it was horrible of me? The plan worked two ways, you know; it meant our gaining his help. If he had been nasty we could not have had the use of the schooner."

The trader did not answer. His blood was racing feverishly. His mind was in a whirl. Nothing was clear save the knowledge that Wilson was nothing to Ellen. The first of the wind rustled the coconut-fronds, and the cutter's sails filled, and her nose swung for the river-bar. But he did not notice it. It was not until a wisp of the girl's hair brushed his cheek, and he felt her hand on his arm that he managed to collect himself.

"Please, please don't say you think badly of me for it," Ellen was saying entreatingly. Her face was very close to his. Their shoulders touched. He half-turned and looked into her eyes.

"Ellen!" he whispered hoarsely. The next moment his arms were about her, and her face was buried in his coat.

A number of natives were standing about, watching curiously. The pair on the palm-trunk did not heed them. Even the sight of Wilson striding through the compound to the river-beach to meet the cutter now swinging in to the bank did not disturb them.

"The natives believe you to be a witch. I think you are—you have bewitched me."

"Peter!" She raised her face to his. For a time there was silence, and the natives began to slip away.

". . . . I will go with you as far as Moresby . . . and when you have finished your visit to your brother, I will . . . meet you there . . ."

". . . We will honeymoon 'down south' somewhere——"

"You are a whale for keeping promises, Sherwin," boomed a jovial voice.

The pair sprang apart. Captain Morton was coming through the palms from the river, where the cutter nestled against the bank. "You've made her happy, all right."

THE END.

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